

IN EARTHEN VESSELS

Dale Grissom

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Phone: 662-283-1192

E-Mail: choate@WorldEvangelism.org

Dedication

With thanks
to my wife, Eulah
and my daughter, Patricia

Introduction

“But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15, KJV).

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels...” 2 Corinthians 4:7, KJV

From the beginning, God spoke to the heads of families, such as Adam, Abraham, and Jacob, and guided them personally. He then chose the descendants of Abraham (the Israelites) to be His chosen people and spoke to them through Moses, the judges, and the prophets. Then Jesus came to earth and brought a new Gospel, the Gospel of Christ. He chose earthen vessels, the apostles and other disciples, to spread His Gospel. The first Gospel sermon was preached on the Day of Pentecost and more than 3000 were baptized. These new converts would later be scattered abroad and would go teaching the way of salvation. Throughout the generations since that time, the Gospel has always been spread the same way, through earthen vessels. God no longer speaks to heads of families or through inspired religious leaders but through the common man. It is up to all Christians to spread the Gospel wherever and whenever they can.

When my dad first spoke of writing this, his third book, he wanted its focus to be on personal evangelism. Most of the following articles reflect this focus, which has been for many years the focus of the author's life. Through a life dedicated to private study, he has learned to be a successful personal worker and, though he is now retired, he will never retire from the work of teaching others about Christ. The author approaches personal work with humility and with a deep belief that it is up to each and every one of us to bring the Gospel to the lost world.

Patricia Adams

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Growing in Number and In Spirit

Real church growth is not the same as “swelling,” which occurs when Christians move from one congregation of the Lord’s people to another. Real growth comes when sinners are converted to Christ; it is the result of evangelism.

In order for evangelism to be really effective, more Christians need to be involved. We must equip ourselves for this task through diligent study and prayer. Then we must apply what we have learned in the teaching of others. We also need to lend support to one another in this work; those who are actively involved in evangelism need a network of support from their brethren.

Growing congregations have a number of needs. The first that comes to mind is unity. Elders, deacons, preachers and teachers must be committed to the goal of being what God would have us to be. The second is vision. All the leadership must be able to visualize and plan for desired long-range accomplishments. And the third is balance — in evangelism, education and benevolence. Extremes either to the right or to the left must be avoided.

An often-overlooked avenue that affords great opportunity for teaching the gospel is Christian counseling. Every congregation would benefit from having someone, ideally someone in the leadership, who is prepared to offer counseling based upon principles found in the word of God. This is a means by which the world can be reminded that Jesus is the greatest counselor who ever lived and the Bible is the greatest book on counseling ever written.

Should Your Conscience Be Your Guide?

It is often said to those pondering a course of action, “Let your conscience be your guide.” This may or may not be a good idea. A conscience that is not guided by the word of God can be misleading. Consider Saul of Tarsus. He was born under the Law of Moses and was really “into” the Jewish religion. When he began to persecute the church of our Lord, it seemed to be the right thing to do. After “seeing the light”

and being converted by the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16), he reflected that he had done all in a good conscience (Acts 23:1).

It is possible for one's conscience to be without feeling. The apostle Paul wrote concerning this in I Timothy 4:2: "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." It is becoming more and more obvious that we are surrounded by those who have no moral conscience — unmarried men and women living together, homosexuality, pornography, profanity, lying, gambling and all other kinds of worldliness. (Read and consider Galatians 5:19-23). Pity the children who grow up in such surroundings!

A good conscience — one that has been trained by much prayer and Bible study — is to be treasured highly. Such a conscience, coupled with a loving heart, is a wonderful blessing which will help us avoid sin. An evil conscience, however, is a dangerous and horrible thing. If we are to let our conscience be our guide, let us be absolutely certain that conscience is guided by the word of God.

The Good News in Preaching!

It is obvious from bulletins and reports that the church of Christ is doing well and experiencing great growth in such places as Africa, India, South America and American Samoa. It is reported that 1500 new congregations are established in Africa each year and that there are now more congregations of the Lord's body in Africa than in America. The inhabitants of India are reported to be the most religious people in the world, and many congregations of the Lord's church are being established there each month. This is very good news!

Those of us who live in America should be encouraged by the great growth of the church in these foreign countries, and we should rejoice because of it. However, there are places where the church is not growing. Such places need to be revitalized and their spirit of evangelism renewed.

Christ's command concerning evangelism is so clear that we cannot help but understand it. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:

and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19-20). The Lord has placed the gospel in our hands and with it the responsibility of planting the word into the hearts of those who are lost. We are to do the work and trust that God will give the increase.

Each of us has opportunities every day, but we often do not recognize them, because we are not looking for them. May we renew our resolve to teach the lost and may we look outward to the needs of others rather than inward to our own selfish desires. May we seek opportunities to spread the Word. May we be like the apostle Paul who proclaimed in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

And may we always be mindful of the great honor and responsibility God has bestowed upon mankind when He entrusted us with the gospel of Christ.

“Not Forsaking the Assembling...”

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). How sad it is that some members of the Lord’s body do not see the importance of assembling regularly with the saints. It is understood, of course, that there are those who cannot be at services due to illness or other circumstances. But, brethren, let’s be sure that when we miss, it is for a legitimate reason and that we are not merely offering excuses. The author of Hebrews continues in the very next verse, “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins....”

When we fail to assemble, we miss the opportunity to worship with the saints: to fellowship in the Lord’s supper (Acts 20:7), to pray together (Acts 12:12), to engage in Bible study (2 Timothy 2:15), to sing (Ephesians 5:19), and to give of our means (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). There is no substitute for worshiping together with the whole assembly of the church. Fellowship is a very important part of our growth,

In order for us to grow in our faith, we must spend much time talking

with God in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and much time in Bible study learning His will for our lives (2 Timothy 2:15). This communication is essential to our spiritual growth: “So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). If we desire to have great faith, we must be willing to put forth the effort to assemble, to study, to pray and to help our weak brothers to grow. Our lights cannot shine if we are not strong in the faith. If we fail to assemble, we cannot expect to have a positive influence on others. May we always strive to set a good example.

Trust

It is so important that we be trustworthy and that we learn to trust one another. Those of us who are older can remember a time when there seemed to be a more trusting attitude among the brethren, but, in our present time, much of that seems to have been lost. A primary cause of this problem may well be the error that is being taught within the church by influential men who have quit preaching the pure gospel of Christ. The existence and prevalence of false teachers will naturally cause faithful Christians to grow suspicious and wary.

We must measure everything by the word of God. The apostle Paul, in writing to the Corinthian brethren said, “But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9). Sometimes people foolishly start to think they are so wise that they don’t need to measure everything by God’s word.

If we will commit ourselves to God and trust him completely, we will find a peace and confidence that can come only by knowing our Lord Jesus Christ. By learning God’s word we can recognize the truth, not only in ourselves, but in our brethren as well. We are not to have confidence in the flesh but in God. Paul, writing in Philippians 3:3 said, “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” We are not to trust in the flesh. “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). Let us put our trust completely in God and we will not be disappointed.

The Importance of Forgiveness

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15). To hold on to anger and resentment is a hurtful and painful act toward oneself, as well as toward others. God's forgiveness toward us is dependent upon our willingness to forgive others, yet many hold hurt, anger and resentment in their hearts. Psychologists tell us that a large percentage of those who suffer from depression will not let go of feelings of anger and guilt. We must learn to rid ourselves of these destructive emotions.

Many murders committed are a result of uncontrolled anger. Numerous domestic situations of abuse, divorce and murder are caused by husbands, wives and children who are unwilling to free themselves of anger by allowing God to help them forgive others. When we make a strong commitment to God and turn our lives over to Him, we must rid ourselves of hateful feelings. These things stand in the way of a right relationship with God. We must learn to love the souls of others and make an effort to bring them to Christ.

Consider the words of Christ as recorded in Matthew 5:43-44: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you...." It is difficult to hold anger toward a person if you are praying for him. Christians who are busy in the Lord's church don't have time to nourish hurts and feed on negative thoughts.

Be Committed

We are filled with joy and enthusiasm when we obey the gospel of Christ — ready and determined to give our all to Him. As time passes,

however, that zeal dwindles and we may find ourselves drifting along and becoming lukewarm. Jesus told the church of the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:15-16: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." We must never lose sight of our responsibility to the Lord, diligently giving of our time and talents.

It is so easy to get caught up in the activities of day-to-day living. We intend to give more time to the Lord, but days pass and we fail to put Him first. We continue to allow the cares of this world to come before the Lord. The excuse is often made, "Just as soon as I can regain control of my life, I will give more time to serving God." When will we learn that we must give Him the control in order to know that inner peace for which we are all longing?

God paid the greatest price — made the supreme sacrifice. In order to save mankind, He gave His precious Son. The home He has prepared for all His faithful children after judgment (Hebrews 9:27) is a prize we cannot earn, but it will be given to those who are faithful in doing His will. The apostle Paul spoke concerning this in the second recorded letter to Timothy, his "son in the faith": "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but to all them also who love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

God requires us to be totally committed to Him: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). Nothing short of putting the Lord first in our lives will satisfy Him.

May we strive to use ourselves up in service to the Lord. There is hard work to be done if we are to convert the lost in our community and reach out to the rest of the world. Every soul is precious. Each one we win to Christ will have the opportunity to spend eternity in heaven. Now is the hour.

When Opportunity Knocks, Open the Door

Christians sometimes try to excuse our lack of involvement in person-

al evangelism by claiming we are unable to find prospects for Bible study. Perhaps we are looking in the wrong places, if indeed we are looking at all!

We are surrounded by folks who are willing to study, if they are approached in the right way and at the right time. Friends, fellow workers and those who are hurting physically and emotionally make good prospects, as do family members of fellow Christians. Those who visit worship services may very well be searching for the Lord and would welcome an invitation to study. Some have visited the services of the church for years yet have never obeyed the gospel. Has anyone ever taken the time to encourage them?

Winning lost souls may be the hardest work you will ever do, but it will certainly be the most rewarding. Just think of it: You can help someone prepare to live with Christ forever in heaven! There is no more important work than this.

Winning lost souls will also be the most loved work you will ever do. What a wonderful feeling it is when the one you've taught comes to an understanding of the gospel plan of salvation, obeys his Lord in baptism, and arises to a new life in Christ! So when opportunity knocks, be sure to open the door!

Accepting Personal Responsibility

As a nation we are experiencing an era in which no one wants to accept responsibility for his actions. Blaming others for our mistakes has become the norm. People who are brought to justice for crimes will protest that what they did was not their fault; perhaps they claim poverty or an abusive childhood is to blame. This problem spans all ages and situations, from the very highest of our political offices down to the very smallest child in the home.

Failure to accept responsibility affects positions of leadership in the church. Elders bear a greater responsibility than others. It is an awesome responsibility to watch over men's souls. Elders must be men of strength, guiding the flock through the narrow way, always watchful for those "wolves" who would lead it astray. They have a responsibility to stand for the right even when the right is not the easy course.

Failure to accept responsibility affects the home. God has placed the husband as head of the home and as such, he bears a great responsibility, both to his wife and to his children. God has designated the wife to be the keeper of the home. Problems arise when one or both fail to accept their God-given roles and responsibilities. Parents, by word and deed, ought to be teaching their children to accept responsibility. Children should know that they will be held accountable for their behavior; they should not be allowed to blame friends, teachers, employers, etc. for their misdeeds. We do our children a great disservice when we protect them from the consequences of their actions.

We also must realize — and we must teach our children — that we cannot depend upon others for our edification and salvation. Each of us has a responsibility to develop good study habits and become acquainted with the word of God. No one else can do it for us and no one else will be responsible if we fall short.

In the end, God will hold each of us accountable for our actions. Please consider carefully the words of Hebrews 9:27: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment....” When that great day comes, God will accept no excuses. We cannot blame someone else for our own failures.

The Importance of Faithfulness

Faithful Christians love to see others obey the gospel plan of salvation. We are thrilled when new brothers and sisters are born into the family of God, knowing that their sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ and that they are now as white as snow.

How sad it is that many new Christians will fall away, going back into the world and becoming wayward children of God, once again entangled in sin. It is truly heartbreaking when those who know God become unfaithful. The Lord spoke clearly about the importance of faithfulness: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). The apostle Paul wrote concerning his own faithfulness. He was confident that the Lord would give him a crown of righteousness at that day, and to all who loved His appearing (2 Timothy

4:7-8). The author of the book of Hebrews also admonished, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together; as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

Far too many Christians take the responsibility of assembling with the saints too lightly. If we love the Lord as we should, we will want to be present every time the saints meet together. It is so easy to make excuses. If we let a headache, a ballgame, a shopping trip or any other worldly activity keep us from the assembly, we need to examine our hearts and ask ourselves just who or what has top priority in our lives.

Sometimes those who have become unfaithful in their attendance will vow to return once they get their problems solved. How sad that they do not realize that commitment to the Lord is essential in solving those problems.

Let each of us resolve to be faithful children of God in every aspect of our lives, and may we always love our weaker brethren enough to encourage them to faithfulness and good works.

About Our Father's Business

With each new year comes a time of reflecting and resolving — reflection on mistakes and missed opportunities, and resolution to do better this year. As we begin the new year, may we resolve to be alert and on the lookout for opportunities to bring others to Christ. Soul winning and personal work go hand-in-hand. Christians are to be busy seeking and saving the lost.

Many of us do not know our Bible as well as we should. Therefore, we fear trying to teach others. We are afraid we will be asked questions we can't answer. It is good to attend Bible classes and to listen attentively to preaching every Sunday, but until we are willing to spend time diligently studying the Bible, we will never have a good working knowledge of God's word. Without this knowledge, we will always be afraid to try to teach others.

Brethren often give generously to send missionaries to all parts of the world — many to undesirable and even unsafe areas. We are blessed to have those who are willing to serve in this capacity. Though this is a

good and needed work, our support of these efforts does not relieve us of our personal obligation to teach others. There is much to be done right here at home.

The new year has only 365 days. May each of us resolve to waste no more time, but to prepare ourselves to carry out the Lord's commission to go and teach. Let us be about our Father's business.

Where Do You Want to Spend Eternity?

This is a question that all of us must answer because each of us has a choice. The wise will choose heaven, and then work toward that end.

Shortly before His death, Jesus spoke these words of encouragement to his apostles: "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3). And the beloved John revealed: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). Heaven is indeed a wonderful place where the soul shall live for eternity.

God's love for us is so great: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). He made it possible for us to have our sins forgiven. He gave us the gospel. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

Obedience to the gospel plan of salvation is absolutely essential if we are to have forgiveness of sins. We are told in I Corinthians 15 that the gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. We are obedient to the gospel when we reenact the death, burial and resurrection of Christ by believing in Him (Mark 16:16), repenting of our sins (Acts 17:30), confessing Him before men (Romans 10:10), being baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and living faithfully until death (Revelation 2:10). Only through obedience to this plan can we have our sins forgiven and be added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47). Those who choose not to obey

the gospel are actually choosing to spend eternity in hell. What a horrible choice to make! Jesus knew that, unfortunately, that would be the choice of most of the world, for He encouraged His disciples in the sermon on the mount, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

"...Restore Such a One in the Spirit of Meekness..."

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Restoring the erring is one area in which the church is badly failing.

It is reported that only fifty percent of new converts remain faithful for over five years. Brethren, this just ought not to be. We must do a better job of nurturing our babes in Christ — encouraging, teaching, loving and bonding, making them feel a welcome and important part of the family of God.

The apostle Paul admonishes us to restore the erring in the spirit of meekness. How can we accomplish this if we don't care about our brethren? And how can we truly care for someone we barely know? The church is the family of God, and as such, we must work to develop a genuine love for each other. Only by spending time in prayer for each other, and by spending time getting to know each other, can we build that bond that God would have us to build. If we have the love we should have for our spiritual family we will be grieved when a brother or sister goes back into the world.

Every person who obeys from the heart the gospel plan of salvation becomes a child of God, and God adds him to the church (Acts 2:47). He will always be a child of God. Though he may become unfaithful, he does not cease to be a part of God's family; he is instead a wayward child. Consider the children of Israel, how time and time again they were unfaithful. God grieved over their sins, yet forgave them each time they repented and turned back to Him.

Each of us must truly become our brothers' keeper. We must work to set the proper example for others, and we must encourage and build each other up. We must not be timid about talking to one another about matters that concern our souls and where we will spend eternity. May each of us determine to become more spiritually-minded and more sensitive concerning the needs of our brethren.

Christianity is a serious business; we are preparing for eternity. Let's be sure we don't take it too lightly — our souls are dependent upon it!

What Parents Owe Their Children

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3). While on the surface this admonition seems to be to children, it contains a direct application to parents as well. We have a responsibility to live worthy of our children's honor and respect. Children deserve to grow up in homes where they will be trained and restrained (Proverbs 22:6; 13:24; 23:13; 22:5), and where the proper example will be set for them.

It is important that children see their parents living lives devoted to God. They should see mom and dad spending time in prayer and Bible study and engaging in family devotionals. Their home life should be one in which they see humility, service and reverence to God practiced. It is not enough to tell our children the way; we must live it before them.

Fathers especially have a great responsibility, as they have been charged with providing leadership for their families. “And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). A wise father will turn to the Scriptures for guidance, and he will strive to put into practice those things he learns. We can read many examples of good and bad parenting in the Bible but the account of Eli is a particularly sobering one. While he was a great judge of Israel (I Samuel 3), he was a failure as a father. He did not train his sons to be good men, and they paid the ultimate price.

Consider the Christian graces found in 2 Peter 1:5-8. “And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowl-

edge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” May we strive to take on these qualities and teach them to our children. And may God bless us and guide us as we do so.

Forgiveness

“And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses” (Mark 11:25-26).

Many people, including those who are Christians, have difficulty forgiving others. Consequently, they harbor anger and bitterness in their hearts and are generally unhappy people. Emotional problems may result because they hold on to their pain and resentment.

Families often suffer from an inability to forgive. Many husbands and wives never know the joys of a peaceful, loving union. Children growing up in such households learn only bitterness and misery. Others grow up in one-parent homes because Mom or Dad could not let go of past hurts. Sadly, most of these children reach adulthood thinking that painful relationships are the norm. Therefore, the cycle repeats itself in their marriages.

Likewise, the church suffers when its members fail to forgive one another. When pride and resentment overcome love and peace, unity is replaced by hostility. The damage done within the church and in the eyes of the community may never be repaired.

Forgiveness requires a constant effort. Those who have learned to forgive experience a peace that can only be found in living a righteous life. Their example of love, humility, and gentleness can be a real encouragement to those who have difficulty forgiving.

The Joy of Seeking the Lost

Relatively few congregations of the Lord’s church are actively involved in local evangelism. Very few indeed even make a pretense of

engaging in one-on-one personal evangelism. Many have pulpit preachers, involvement ministers, youth ministers, education ministers, family ministers and/or bus ministers, and are probably involved in overseas missions, yet they never seriously consider their responsibility in the area of local personal evangelism.

Could it be that the need for personal evangelism is not preached because we don't like to be reminded of our shortcomings? Do we ignore the Great Commission in order to avoid a guilt trip? We are a people who pride ourselves on keeping the commandments of the Lord, yet we ignore the Great Commission. We understand that, in order to be obedient, we must comply with commands, necessary inferences, and examples in the Bible. Concerning personal evangelism, we have the command (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16); we have the inference that the gospel was preached by Philip to the eunuch (Acts 8:35); and we have example after example of the gospel being presented on a personal basis in the book of Acts. Brethren, that is the way the early church reached people and that is the way we must reach people today.

We must learn to love the souls of men. We must care enough to seek them and teach them. Let us strive to become true servants of the Lord, unselfishly reaching out to others rather than being so completely wrapped up in ourselves. There is more to life than satisfying our own selfish desires;-there is immeasurable joy in reaching the lost with the gospel.

Let us look to Christ for our example, trying to be as much like Him as we can, walking each day in the way He would have us to go. And let us not grow weary in well-doing, but keep pressing on to the mark of a higher calling by our Lord (Galatians 6:9; Philippians 3:14).

"His Word Was in My Heart Like a Burning Fire Shut Up in My Bones..."

If we really expect to win the lost to Christ, we will strive to be like Him by adding the fruit of the Spirit to our lives: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23). Then we must mature as Christians and be like the prophet Jeremiah who said, “But his word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.”

Personal evangelism is really about obeying the commandments of the Lord: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19-20).

If we will empty ourselves of all selfishness, false pride and rebellion, really strive to put God first in our lives, and develop a love for lost souls, we can do much for the Lord through personal evangelism. We must look for opportunities to teach others the gospel of Christ. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

We must set goals for ourselves if we expect to be successful in evangelizing. We must first determine to win lost souls, then work diligently to make it happen. We start by winning one soul to Christ, then another and another. We must not be overcome by fear but work hard to accomplish our goals, using the early Christians as our example: “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and halting men and women committed them to prison. Therefore, they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:3-4). Just think what could be accomplished for the Lord if every Christian were to take advantage of every opportunity to teach.

The Advantage of Being Needy

Reports from missionaries in India and Africa indicate a great acceptance of God’s word there. These are said to be two of the most religious places in the world. They are also two of the poorest. It is noteworthy that people who are lacking in material blessings are often those who are the most receptive to the gospel. These people feel a great need, which is a motivating force in their lives.

Even in America, the wealthiest country in the world, people who feel “in need” are more receptive to God’s word. This is true whether the need is material or emotional. Those who have emotional needs are often seeking peace of mind and contentment. Our job as Christians is to show them that all spiritual blessings are in Christ — that peace of mind, joy, happiness, love, trust and hope are all found in Him. He is the answer to our needs. He brings hope to our loves.

We are the earthen vessels to whom God has entrusted the gospel. It is our responsibility to teach the gospel every time we have the opportunity, and to be alert and watchful for those opportunities. Because the gospel is the power to save (Romans 1:16), it is the only means by which the lost can be brought to Christ and His church. The truth does not change. The same gospel that led three thousand souls to Christ on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached the word (Acts 2:41) is the same gospel that will save souls today. We have what the world needs. May we take seriously the responsibility to sow the seed of salvation to a lost and needy world, trusting in God to give the increase.

The Benefits of a Positive Attitude

Attitude has so much to do with Christian living. A negative attitude will cause us to be overly-critical, seeing only the dark side of life. Such a perspective is very depressing. When we see only the bad, we cannot experience the joys of being a Christian.

The Christian’s focus should be on the positive. Pause for a moment and consider our surroundings. See the wonderful world God created for the enjoyment of man: the sunrise, the majestic mountains, the rivers and oceans, the beautiful flowers and trees, and all the magnificent wonders of the world. What a great love God has for mankind! How can such a blessed people help but be happy?

The positive Christian has hope burning like a flame in his heart. He has learned from God’s word about His love for His children and he knows the great price God paid for all of us - not just for the faithful, but for all the souls of the whole world: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should

not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Realizing the tremendous price that was paid for us, we cannot help but be joyful and confident in the promises of God. He has assured us that, if we remain faithful, we will receive that crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Another of the beauties and joys of this life is the Christian home. A true Christian home is one with loving, godly parents who are working together to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Such a home is made up of individuals who love each other and who desire to spend eternity together in heaven. To achieve their goal, a Christian family spends time studying together in order to be familiar with God’s roadmap to heaven.

Attitude can make the difference between being saved and being lost. Jesus described His followers as the light of the world, a city set on a hill (Matthew 5:14). Let’s be sure the world knows that we are happy to be Christians.

Baptism Is Essential

Please consider carefully the words of Mark 16:16: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” In this passage we find Christ, just before His ascension into heaven, instructing His disciples concerning the Great Commission. Christ teaches here that baptism is essential to our salvation and that we must do more than just believe — we must also be baptized.

We read again of the necessity of baptism in I Peter 3:21: “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” This scripture plainly teaches that baptism saves us.

The gospel plan of salvation is made very clear in God’s word. We read in Romans 10:17 that we must hear the word: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Hebrews 11:6 teaches the necessity of belief: “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Acts 17:30 tells us that we must

repent of our sins: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." In Romans 10:10 we find that belief and confession are necessary: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." In Acts 2:38 baptism is commanded: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." And finally, we are to live faithfully: "...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Unselfish Love

Agape is a Greek word denoting unconditional love and unselfish giving. God is love, and He is the One from whom agape flows: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God demonstrated His unselfish love for an unlovable world by sacrificing His Son.

In marriage, agape love is a deliberate, lifelong commitment of giving without expecting to receive in return. It is evident from the number of divorces in the world today that agape is the missing ingredient in many marriages. We have been deluded in the belief that love is a feeling to fall in and out of. This false impression produces excuses such as "I do not love him anymore," and contributes to our high divorce rate.

Agape love is not a feeling of attraction. Giving agape love involves commitment and persistence in marriage, as well as in life. The love that never fails (1 Corinthians 13:8) should help us to remain committed to those promises made on our wedding day to love our mate for better, for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, till death do us part. Through prayer and study we can expect God to help us develop agape love. Since agape love is a willful commitment to give, it must be followed by action. The more of it we give away, the more of it we will receive. Regardless of how little love we receive in our marriage, we will always have love if we give it.

Lord, help us to put agape love to work in our lives.

“In Honor Preferring One Another...”

The apostle Paul understood that brotherly love is something to be greatly treasured among Christian brethren: “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another” (Romans 12:10). Christians share the greatest common goal, and that is, to spend eternity in heaven. This desire should cause brethren to want to be with each other and to prefer one another.

A Christian’s greatest support in this world should come from his spouse, his partner for life. When a Christian chooses to marry a non-Christian, he is committing to a life-long relationship with a partner who does not share his faith in God. Because they don’t have agreement upon the word of God, this couple may find it very difficult to agree in other matters as well. A wise Christian will seek a mate who will help him get to heaven.

We also need friends who will encourage us. The world is constantly tugging at Christians, trying to pull us away from Christ. Satan works on us in three ways: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). We need to build strong relationships that will strengthen us in our everyday struggles. Brethren who truly love and prefer one another are a great source of support to each other in times of trial and temptation.

A sweet and precious fellowship results when a congregation has love and preference for one another. Christians enjoy harmony and look forward to spending time with their brothers and sisters in Christ. But a very cold and distant congregation is the result of brethren who do not prefer one another in love. Pettiness will abound, and there will be friction in the congregation.

God’s commandments are not burdensome (1 John. 5:3), and we miss so much when we fail to love as He would have us to. He has set such a great example of love for us. May we strive to be more like Him, and may we always prefer one another as He would have us to do.

We Need Thee, Lord

“Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee; let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me. Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause. Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day. Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving kindnesses; for they have been ever of old” (Psalm 25:1-6).

As we read the words of David pouring out his heart to God, it is apparent why God referred to him as “a man after His own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). Desiring to be close to the Lord, David bared his soul to Him. Brethren, we, too, need to move closer to God by lifting up our souls and bring our hearts to Him. It is our responsibility and our privilege to please our Lord. We ought to continually thank Him for His loving kindness toward us; for it is through Him and from Him that we have mercy, love, peace, joy, comfort, and the hope of eternal life.

We need to develop patience and learn to wait upon the Lord, for He truly is the Lord of our salvation. We should realize and be forever grateful that He has provided us with a roadmap to heaven. Let us diligently read and study His word that we might show ourselves approved unto Him.

Lord, help us not to be selfish, but to be kind, loving, and generous to others. Help us to get past our own desires that we may be close to Thee, and that we may serve Thee faithfully all the days of our lives. Help us to realize that we need Thee and that we are poverty-stricken without Thee. Help us to worship and adore Thee.

Going the Extra Mile

Have you ever lost a loved one who had not obeyed the gospel, or one who was a Christian but had not lived faithfully? Such a loss is so much more difficult to bear than the death of one whose relationship to God was what it should be. It is hard to cope with the knowledge that we had failed to make a difference in that life, especially if no effort was made on our part.

People all around us are starving for the gospel; many are just waiting for someone to talk to them about their souls. How sad it will be if, on the Day of Judgment, someone turns and says to us, “You never mentioned Him to me.”

All of us have opportunities to talk to people about their souls. Many times we are afraid, and we don’t know what to say. We dare not let the fear of rejection stand in the way of the message of salvation. The stakes are too high; the cost is too great.

It is easy to make excuses for our failure to teach — we are too busy, or we are afraid, or we have ministers supported by the church who do this work. All Christians have been entrusted with the responsibility of taking the gospel to the world (Matthew 28:19-20), and the world begins just outside our door. God will not look kindly upon our excuses.

Do we care enough to put forth the effort? May we prepare ourselves to go the extra mile.

Servants of Whom?

All Christians would benefit from regular self-examination. Consider the following questions and please answer them thoughtfully and sincerely: Am I truly a servant of my Lord? Do I serve Him with my whole being? Do I love Him with all my heart, soul and mind? Am I winning lost souls? Do I find joy in seeing my brethren prosper, especially if they are more prosperous than I? Am I living the Christian life? What about my relationship with God: Does it come from a pure and honest heart? Did you answer truthfully? Are you surprised at your answers?

Being a servant of the Lord is a great honor; true happiness is found in serving Him. The Lord Himself taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Unfortunately, selfishness is a way of life for many, resulting in very unhappy lives.

Satan is engaged in a constant war with God for the souls of men. He has been deceiving man ever since the creation, and he continues to send the wrong messages. His deceit places many under bondage to him, and blinds those who are under his control. In our fast-paced world, it is all too easy to neglect our responsibility to study God’s word,

to pray and to serve the Lord as we should. By shutting God out, we leave the door wide open for Satan.

We are all servants, either of the Lord or of Satan. There is no neutral position wherein we can just sit back and wait to see who will win. The Bible is very clear about who will win this great battle: God will be victorious. Our efforts are needed in this battle; we need to be teaching and preaching the gospel, bringing the lost to Him before it is everlastingly too late.

May God's children learn to seek the better things in life, for these blessings truly are found in Christ. Through diligent and thoughtful study of the word of God, we will come to understand that happiness, peace of mind, joy, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith and love are found in Him (Galatians 5:22-23).

"...For They Watch for Your Souls..."

Men who serve as elders of the Lord's church have a great responsibility both to God and to the congregation. Consider 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine."

The congregation, in turn, has a responsibility to the elders. Our attitude toward them should be positive; we should love them and give them the respect they deserve. In fact, we are commanded to do this in Hebrews 13:17: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Those who serve as shepherds of the flock are constantly aware that our souls will live forever, and they are ever mindful of their responsibility to see that we are being taught and are teaching only sound doctrine.

There is nothing so important as where we will spend eternity. If we go to heaven we will have everlasting joy, but if we go to hell we will suffer everlasting punishment. Thank God for men who are godly elders, who guide us as we travel the narrow road with the strait gate. May we strive to make theirs a work of joy and peace.

Love One Another

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:7-13).

What a wonderful blessing that God loves us so much. And what a comfort to know that even when we are difficult to love, He still loves us. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

The Lord’s love is unconditional. He loves mankind — not because we are lovable, but because He wants to love us. Christ’s great love for man should be an example for each of us and should motivate us to love others. A Christian should love all souls - not because they are perfect, but in spite of their imperfections. It is not the things that are worldly and sinful that we are to love, but the souls of those who are lost in sin.

The soul is eternal; it never dies. Do we really believe that? If we truly understand and believe that fact, and if we have the love for our fellow man that God wants us to have, we should have no trouble sharing the gospel with the lost. We will also love one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Peter 1:22), and love God with all our heart, mind, and soul and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39).

Winning Souls for Christ, Part 1

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:16-17).

The church grows when believers are baptized into Christ, and God adds those who are being saved to the church (Acts 2:47). Christians moving from one congregation to another do not constitute church growth. There is no growth until a believer obeys the gospel plan of salvation.

If the church in our community is not growing, it is because we are not confronting people with the gospel of Christ. We make the excuse that no one will listen, but how do we know? Have we really tried? We have no problem talking about sports or material things but can offer only excuses about why we are not spreading the gospel. We simply must learn to talk about spiritual things and to lovingly confront the lost about where their souls will spend eternity.

It is easy to dream about serving the Lord, but giving ourselves whole-heartedly to Christ takes real effort on our part. The eternal destination of so many souls depends on our willingness to put forth that effort. May each of us resolve to do our part in winning souls. Let us pray that the Lord will fill our hearts with love for the lost, so much so that we will be willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to take the gospel to a lost and dying world.

Jesus Christ, the greatest role model, commanded His disciples to spread the gospel: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The world begins just outside our door.

Winning Souls For Christ, Part 2

Motivation is one of the most necessary elements in effective soul winning, yet it is also the quality that is lacking in most of us. Motivation is what gives us that nudge we need to talk to a friend or family member about his eternal destiny. It is the “boost” that gets us past just caring about a lost soul and actually doing what we can to keep him from hell.

Most of us try to avoid confrontation, so when we are urged to “confront the lost with the gospel,” we feel uncomfortable. Just as we are to love the sinner and not the sin, we can confront without being confrontational. We can invite people to come to services with us so they can hear the word being preached. In addition, we should prepare ourselves, through diligent study of God’s word, so we can confidently and lovingly present the gospel. The apostle Paul boldly spoke of its power in Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

We don’t have to know everything about the Bible in order to teach others, but we do need to familiarize ourselves with the basics: Christ promised to build His church (Matthew 16:13-20); that church was established (Acts 2); numerous examples of conversions are contained in the book of Acts. Patterns and guidelines for acceptable worship and for living the Christian life are found throughout the New Testament.

Brethren, we simply must stop making excuses. We must study in order to know the word and to be able to teach it; we cannot teach what we do not know. “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even unto the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discern-er of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Christians are produced and souls added to the church when the gospel is taught to good and honest hearts. We dare not shun our responsibility to teach it.

True Faith Produces Good Works

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Romans 10:17 teaches us the source of our faith: “So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” And James, by inspiration, teaches us how to profit by our faith: “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God: thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works

is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" (James 2:17-21).

When we consider the lethargy in the Lord's church today we are made to wonder about the kind of faith we have. The scriptures are not silent with regard to the many areas of righteous works in which Christians are to be involved. We can all busy ourselves by visiting the sick and the shut-ins, and by reaching out with the gospel of Christ: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27); and "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

May the words of our Lord make a deep and lasting impression upon us as we consider the works of our faith:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was ahungered and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him saying, Lord, when saw we thee ahungered, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then he shall say also to them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels... Inasmuch as ye did it not to

one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:31-46).

God Will Make Good on His Promises

“When Jesus came unto the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the son of man, am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed are thou, Simon Barjonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:13-18). Shortly after this time, Jesus was crucified on the cross and was buried; the third day He arose from the grave and was seen of many (1 Corinthians 15). Then, after forty days, He returned to His Father in heaven, and sat down beside Him to rule over all things forever.

The prophecies concerning the Messiah have been fulfilled; it was now time for the Lord’s church to be established. We read in the second chapter of Acts that the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, and Peter preached the first gospel sermon to the Jews who were gathered there that day: “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

The message is the same to us today as it was to those people then. When we obey the gospel of Christ and live faithfully according to His word, we have the promise of eternal life. God’s word is truth, and we can have confidence in His promise: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13).

Yes, God is a loving and merciful God Who has given us all we need in order to spend eternity with Him in heaven. But He is also a just God, promising vengeance on those who do not obey Him: “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24).

We can be assured that God will make good on His promises. Where will you spend eternity?

The Choices We Make

Parents have been entrusted with a great responsibility. “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6), and “Bring them up (your children) in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Bringing up children is not easy; it takes a lot of thought, prayer, and commitment. Child-rearing is really a full-time job, especially when the children are small.

Each generation thinks it lives in the most difficult time for bringing up children, but actually every generation has its own advantages and disadvantages. While circumstances and outside influences may differ, parents of each generation are faced with the same task — that of setting the proper example and helping their children make right decisions and good choices. If they are to become responsible adults, children must learn that there are consequences to wrong choices.

Satan has no intention of making the job of parenting easy. He will always try to appeal to a man’s selfish side, enticing parents to putting their own desires ahead of the welfare of the family. Such an attitude will bring heartache to a family and there will surely be a price to pay for the neglect and lack of training given to the children. Because our children grow up so quickly, parents must take advantage of every opportunity to give them the guidance and support they need in making their own decisions. May we all learn from the example of Lois and Eunice so it may be said about our children what was written about Timothy: “And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

God's Chosen People

We hear a lot in the news these days about the Jewish people being the chosen people of God. While this was true during the time the Law of Moses was in effect, we are told by the word of God that this law was taken out of the way and nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). We live in the Christian age, the third and last dispensation. No longer is the physical nation of Israel God's chosen people, the church of Christ is God's spiritual Israel. The church is the family of God, and all the saved are in God's family. Those who obey from the heart the gospel plan of salvation are added by God to the church (Acts 2:47).

Because the church of Christ is made up of God's chosen people, we ought to conduct ourselves in every way as Christians. We must realize that it makes a difference how we live everyday; it makes a difference how we serve the Lord; it makes a difference how we worship God. All must be done in spirit and in truth.

Each of us is faced with choices everyday. Children learn from parents and others about making choices and living with the consequences of their choices. Parents serve as role models, and children learn to make choices based on what they observe from their role models. Christians especially must endeavor to make wise decisions, realizing that our decisions not only affect us, but others as well.

Though we must live in the world, we are not to be partakers of the world. We are tested every day, and someone is watching us to see what choices we will make. The example we set for those around us teaches a much greater lesson than any sermon we might preach. Many have been won for Christ because of the example of a godly father and mother or friend, and many souls will be lost eternally because of a missed opportunity. How important it is that we let our lights shine every day in all we do!

Christian Love (Agape)

To the observer there is less visible love among the brethren than at any time in remembrance. There seems to be so much pride, envy and

distrust that tension can be felt in the air as one enters the auditorium of many church buildings.

The apostle Paul was speaking about Christian love when he penned the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. A study of this letter reveals a great problem among the brethren. Many had received such spiritual gifts as the ability to heal, speak in tongues, prophesy, etc., but those who spoke in tongues thought they had a superior gift, and through their pride they tried to make others feel inferior. This attitude, of course, caused feelings to be hurt and Christian love to be diminished.

Paul pointed out to the brethren that none of their gifts were beneficial without love: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:1-3). Notice again what we just read: Regardless of how much we have or how much we do, without Christian love it profits me nothing.

While the spiritual gifts that were bestowed in the first century do not exist today, Christian love toward God, our brethren and all mankind must be manifest in our lives. God is love, and if we do not have love, we do not have God (1 John 4:8). May our faith continually increase through the knowledge of God's word and through prayer and devotion to the Lord, and may all that we do be done with a pure heart.

The Tongue Is Full of Deadly Poison

The tongue may be one of the smallest members of the body, but it boasts great things. Please consider James 3:6-8: "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, it is full

of deadly poison.” Other cautions concerning the tongue are found in Psalm 34:13: “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile,” and in Proverbs 15:4: “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.”

Think what a different world this would be if people would guard their tongues: gossip would not be a problem, families would live together peacefully, peace would exist between nations, prisons would not be overcrowded, divorce would be rare, and in the church there would be no division. Much pain would be avoided if we would only think before we speak.

As Christians we especially need to control our tongues. We need to use our ability to speak as a means of teaching the word and spreading the gospel throughout the world. We must keep our tongues under control so that we may confront the lost in a gentle, kind and loving manner, and that we may encourage those who have gone back into the world to repent and come back to the Lord. Let us show our love for the Lord by using our tongues to speak words of wisdom which will be edifying to ourselves and others.

Joy in Christ

The apostle Paul, though he suffered much for the cause of Christ, knew the joy of Christian living and wrote about many blessings that brought happiness to his life. Let us focus on some things that brought joy to Paul, and consider how our own lives might be enriched by a greater awareness and appreciation of them.

The joy of prayer: “...Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy...” (Philippians 1:4). How blessed we are, as Christians, to know that we can talk to God and be assured that our prayers are heard!

The joy of gospel preaching: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). Like Paul, we should rejoice when the saving power of the gospel is preached.

The joy of faith: “And having this confidence, I know that I shall

abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith..." (Philippians 1:25). What joy is ours in the Lord because of His promise of salvation to the faithful!

The joy of suffering: "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all" (Philippians 2:17). As Paul considered it a joy and honor to suffer for the cause of Christ, we, too, should be strong enough in our faith and commitment to suffer for Him.

The joy of fellowship: "Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Philippians 2:2). How happy we should be to spend time on earth with those whom we are destined to spend eternity with in heaven!

There is indeed much joy in living the Christian life. Happiness is the reward of those who focus on all the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus and the many physical blessings we receive from Him every day.

A Doer of the Work

We are admonished in James 1:25: "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deeds." There are many works required of Christians, one of which is teaching the gospel to the lost: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Consider also Proverbs 11:30: "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise." And James 2:24: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Winning souls is a work that demonstrates our wisdom. It is essential that Christians teach those in the world the plan of salvation, and then follow that by teaching them to be obedient to all God's commands. Those who receive the word and are baptized into Christ are added to the church: "Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

We are the earthen vessels to whom God has entrusted the responsibility of spreading His word. If we are to carry out our mission as the church of the Lord, we must endeavor to spread the borders of His kingdom. Many who profess to be Christians — members of God's own family — fail to reach out to the lost. Only by awakening from the sleep of idleness will we see the church grow. May we get busy carrying God's message to a lost world, as did the early church in Jerusalem.

Be of the Same Mind

The apostle Paul admonishes the Philippian brethren to be united in love, to be of one mind: "Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory: but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:2-5). How precious it is for God's family to be filled with peace and love, for each to put his brother's welfare ahead of his own!

So how do we develop a loving relationship within the family of God? The answer is really quite simple: we work at it. Just as the relationship we have with our earthly family must be carefully and lovingly nurtured, so must the one with our spiritual family. The more time we spend getting to know one another — laughing together, crying together, and learning to bear one another's burdens — the stronger the tie will be that binds us. And what a great joy to someday be in heaven with all those we have known and loved and worshiped with here on earth!

May each of us strive for a pure heart, one that puts the needs of others before our own. May we put aside pride, selfishness, and pettiness - the characteristics that tear down — and work at developing those attributes which will build up the Lord's church.

How to Achieve Greatness

Paul, in his instructions to Timothy, commanded him not to show preference or partiality toward his brothers and sisters in Christ: "I

charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21).

Christians are not to show favoritism. Indeed, we are to treat all brethren, from the impoverished to the wealthy, with love and respect. Ministries that fail to reach beyond our clique of friends will surely fail. An elder’s or minister’s effectiveness and productivity will suffer if he shows partiality toward a select few. He must show absolute fairness when he hears complaints and must attempt to resolve problems in the congregation if peace is to prevail in the church.

Christians are to treat all people with respect and love. The apostle Peter spoke of God’s nature in Acts 10: 34-35: “Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.”

The society in which we live is very competitive. It is not surprising when favoritism is shown toward those who are in a position to help us reach our goals. We should keep in mind, however, that the highest possible achievement we can realize is that of living a faithful Christian life. True greatness comes when we humbly serve the Lord and our fellow man with all our ability and strength, remaining faithful to God until death (Revelation 2:10).

Following the Greatest Example

Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived upon this earth. His teachings, which are recorded in the Bible, are read by millions every year. They bring peace and happiness to those who obey them.

Jesus had no classroom; He received no salary; He set no age limit. He had no textbook except God’s word. He held no college degrees, yet no other teacher has ever possessed such knowledge. He knew His students and their needs.

Those of us who are Bible teachers sometimes need to stop and reflect on what we are doing, taking care that we do not lose sight of the importance of our job. We are to look to Jesus as the perfect example.

We must know the Bible and teach the lessons contained in it, and we should do so with an eye on eternity. May we never forget that, when we teach from the Bible, we might very well be making that difference in our students' lives that will determine where they will spend eternity. No teacher has more responsibility than do Bible teachers, regardless of the age of our students.

The world is a dangerous teacher. It will take its followers down the wrong path - the broad way that causes unhappiness on earth and leads ultimately to the destruction of the soul. But those of us who teach the truth — God's word — can pillow our heads at night knowing we have helped someone on the road to heaven. Let us never underestimate the importance of what we are doing, and may we always take seriously the great privilege of teaching God's word.

Accepting the Consequences of Our Actions

We are quickly becoming a society wherein no one is held responsible for his actions. A lady buys a cup of hot coffee in a restaurant, spills it on herself, and then proceeds to sue the restaurant. A man rides his bike at night without a light or reflectors and is involved in an accident; he sues the bicycle company. These are but two of thousands of examples that show our society's failure to accept responsibility for its actions.

The world is full of whoremongers, homosexuals, alcoholics, abortionists, rapists, drug addicts, thieves, child abusers, spouse abusers, etc. These sins exist and the resulting problems continue because people are not forced to accept responsibility for their actions.

Children, in years past, were taught responsibility at a very early age by responsible parents. They had jobs assigned to them, and they were required to complete those jobs. They were not allowed to talk back or to talk their way out of doing their chores. Many parents today are intimidated by their children, and in many cases, those children actually rule the home.

Christians are being made more aware of this attitude as it has its effect on the church: homes wrecked by divorce, babies born out of wed-

lock, social drinking, dancing, profanity and promiscuity, especially among teenagers. Once again, we see the result of failure to accept responsibility.

This lack of responsibility could actually destroy the church of the Bible, as well as civilization as we know it. Something must change: People must accept responsibility for their actions. We must learn to always be truthful and to stand for that which is right. Parents must realize their own accountability to God, and must hold their children responsible for their actions in order to build them up morally. Only then will they grow up to be the kind of people capable of making a commitment to God and keeping it.

Heed the Wake-Up Call

Many congregations of the Lord's church are decreasing in number. In the last thirty years in the United States alone, the church has experienced zero growth. Gospel meetings are held without a single response and baptisteries are sitting empty, unneeded for months or even years.

In an effort to increase numbers, some congregations move to new buildings in better parts of the city, build family life centers, host workshops, and focus on giving, strengthening the family, and other sorely needed efforts, yet experience no growth. In some areas, especially urban areas, members drift from one congregation to another. When attendance increases because members move the result is "swelling", not church growth. When one group swells, another loses ground.

Many congregations, however, are losing ground because they have little or no interest in personal evangelism. They may be involved in foreign missions but are doing nothing on the local level. When we fail to take the gospel to the lost in our own communities, we cannot expect to grow numerically.

Christians are the earthen vessels to whom God has committed the gospel; He has made no other provision. What are we doing to meet the responsibility He has placed in our hands? Are we teaching others? Are we showing compassion for those who are lost?

A church that does not grow is destined to die. Let each of us heed

the wake-up call and ask ourselves the vital question: If the future of the church in my town were in my hands, would it grow or die?

Living and Growing in the Grace of God

Becoming a child of God and living faithfully for Him is the greatest thing we can do for ourselves. And what joy fills our hearts when our children and our grandchildren obey the gospel! How precious is the hope of living eternally in heaven with our loved ones.

Obedience to the gospel is the beginning, but every child of God is to mature and continue to grow in the Christian graces: “And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-8). We can achieve this growth by devoting ourselves to Bible study and prayer. Spiritual maturity is possible only when we are willing to take responsibility for our own edification.

We also need to direct our efforts toward those who are lost. Have you ever stopped to think where you would be if you had never heard the gospel of Christ? Too many of us do not feel the urgency to teach others. Instead, we tend to procrastinate, choosing not to think about those who are dying outside of Christ every day.

The time has come for us to throw off lukewarm attitudes and to move toward maturity. We are responsible, not only for our own salvation, but for that of our mates, our children, our grandchildren, our friends, and all those with whom we come in contact. “For when for the time you ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Hebrews 5:12). Let us never forget that in the Day of Judgment each of us will come before the Lord to give an account of our deeds.

Divorce: What Do the Scriptures Teach?

Divorce has become a common occurrence in America. Each Sunday our local newspaper carries a list of citizens who have filed for divorce. Some folks marry and divorce so many times that it is hard to keep up with the name changes! As a result, many children are growing up in one-parent homes or in homes where there is a step-parent.

Matthew recorded the words of Christ concerning divorce and remarriage: “It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Matthew 5:31-32). Later, in response to the Pharisees: “He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her that is put away doth commit adultery” (Matthew 19:8-9). Luke’s record reads: “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery” (Luke 16:18).

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning marriage: “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband: but if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife” (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

Many people do not know or do not care what the Bible teaches concerning marriage; they are divorcing and remarrying without regard for spiritual grounds. Matthew 19:9 records the exception — the only grounds other than death of a mate — that allows one the privilege of remarrying.

Unfortunately, this marriage-divorce-remarriage problem is not confined to the world around us; it has spilled over into the church. May

each of us resolve not only to study and apply the scriptures in this matter, but to teach them to our children. Our eternal lives — and theirs — depend upon it.

The Resurrection

“Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?” (1 Corinthians 15:29). Consider what is being discussed in this passage; the subject is the resurrection of the dead. Paul is saying that it doesn’t make sense to be baptized in the likeness of the death, burial and resurrection if there is no resurrection. Over and over again he drives home the point that there is coming a time when all the dead will be resurrected. Christ proved this by His own resurrection, which was confirmed by many witnesses.

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So every one of us shall give account of himself to God...” (Romans 14:10-12). As Christians, we need to do some serious soul searching and make the proper adjustment, truly repenting of the wrong in our lives so we can live faithfully for the Lord.

There are many in this world who wish there were no resurrection - those whose lives are laden with sin and who give no thought to their spiritual relationship with the Lord. How sad it will be on the Day of Judgment for those who have lived selfishly on earth, having made no preparation for eternity! They have failed to lay up treasures in heaven. Their entire life’s work will be lost, and the soul which will never die will spend eternity in a devil’s hell where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

There is something sadly lacking in each of us if this knowledge does not make us want to teach everyone the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16), and if we are not fervently praying that they will obey God’s word before it is too late.

Be Strong in the Lord And in the Power of His Might

Consider the admonition of the apostle Paul: “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10-11). In the verses following, Paul encourages Christians to put on those things which will protect against the wickedness of the world.

Those who are strong in the faith draw their strength from the power of God’s word. The power to become mature, faithful children of God is found in the Bible and is attained through diligent study and prayer. If our prayer life is strong, we will grow to love God more and more. If we develop good Bible study habits, we will be strengthened as we grow in our knowledge of God’s will.

Living in the midst of an out-of-control society, we have to be strong in order to avoid being lured into its web. When we are strong in the Lord, we are able to withstand the worldly pleasures that come at us every day. These are those around us who have religious beliefs, but who lack a real understanding of the Bible and are in need of our help to guide them. Only if we are strong in the Lord will we be able to lead them to a true understanding of God’s word.

There is a great need for faithful, mature Christians to take the gospel to the world. We must not be satisfied just to strengthen ourselves, but we must evangelize our own community until every soul has had the opportunity to obey the gospel of Christ. Brethren, we are the earthen vessels upon whom God depends to spread the borders of His kingdom. If we do not do it, who will? The harvest is white and the workers are few. Let’s work while we have opportunity.

Are You Doing What You Can?

Though we can point with joy to the large number of converts and the establishment of many congregations in India, Africa, South America and the South Pacific, the churches of Christ are suffering a

decline in our own great country. Members are being lost to death and unfaithfulness at a much higher rate than are converts being baptized into Christ and the erring restored.

Church growth statistics indicate that, in the past ten years, the church of Christ in America has lost about twenty thousand members. Forty years ago it was said with pride that the church was the fastest growing religious organization in the United States. Since that time we have been declining in number because we have lost our zeal and are no longer evangelistic. Very few Christians in this country are committed to personal evangelism.

Even gospel meetings fail to inspire as they did in years past. Sadly, the gospel invitation may be extended many times over without a single response. As we thank God for the freedom to spread His word in this country, let us also pray that people will become more responsive to the gospel. And while we are praying that God will open their hearts to the word, let us remember that it is our responsibility to make the effort to teach them.

The gospel is still the power of salvation (Romans 1:16).. May we, like the apostle Paul, never be ashamed of it. And may our love for all precious souls spur us to go out into our community and preach the gospel of Christ.

How to Grow Close to God

I. Bible Study

- A. Study to show ourselves approved unto God (2 Timothy 2:15).
- B. God speaks to us through His word.
- C. Learn to obey God's commandments.
- D. Come to know His love (John 3:16; Romans 8:35-39).
- E. Learn to respect God.

2. Meditation

- A. Dismiss trivial things from our minds.
- B. Concentrate on thinking about God.
- C. God is love.

- D. He has blessed us.
 - E. Think about His promises.
- 2I. Prayer
- A. Pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17).
 - B. Pray unselfish prayers.
 - C. Pray for unity.
 - D. Pray for our enemies.
 - E. Have a forgiving heart (Matthew 6:14-15).
- IV. Worship
- A. In song (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
 - B. In prayer for one another (Matt. 5:44).
 - C. Lord's supper (Acts 20:7).
 - D. Teaching and Bible study, go preach and teach (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16).
 - E. Giving (I Corinthians 16:2).

Using Our Time Wisely

Each week that we are allowed to live contains 10,080 minutes or 604,800 seconds for us to use. These numbers may sound big, but each of us realizes just how quickly the time flies by. As Christians, we must be aware of our responsibility to use this time wisely and to take advantage of every opportunity we have to serve the Lord.

We have 86,400 waking seconds to use each day. May we not be guilty of wasting it, but may our focus be on using this time to grow in our knowledge of the word and in the Christian graces, in service to the Lord and our fellow man, and to lead others to Christ. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23). We must learn to recognize opportunity when it presents itself, and not let this precious time with which we have been blessed slip away.

David spoke of the brevity of life in Psalm 90:10: "The days of our years are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (NKJV). James, in his letter, speaks of how fleeting life

is: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14).

Let us make our short time on earth a busy time of laying up treasures in heaven, and may we always be mindful of the admonition of the apostle Paul: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

What Does the Church Need Now?

Many believe the answer to the above question is change. But change from what? There are those who are dissatisfied with brethren they have labeled as "Traditionalists" or "Conservatives." In their opinion, these fellow Christians teach a doctrine that is too confining or restrictive. So a move toward changing the "old ways" into "new ways" has a certain appeal to many people. One thing remains clear to me: God will not tolerate, from either side, the preaching of anything but His word (Galatians 1:6-8). The pursuit of truth, above all else, should be the constant goal of all Christians.

What is the change that many are searching for? My observations tell me that the change desired is a revolution. Webster's dictionary partially defines revolution as "the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and the substitute of another by the governed." Though we are not discussing governments, the parallel should be obvious. The dictionary further defines revolt as "a movement or expression of vigorous dissent," or simply, in verb form, "to overthrow." I can't help but conclude that this seems to be the goal of many who preach change. It is not merely a matter of making some "non-doctrinal" changes, but is rather an attempt to completely overhaul the church.

I realize that the church has had its weak moments. Sometimes we get sidetracked from evangelism and edification. There have also been

times when we could have been more loving and understanding. It would be great if many of us would just admit that we do make mistakes. In spite of these shortcomings, can anyone deny that the church puts God before all else? Our commitment to His word is beyond reproach. Only God's will is relevant and nothing else will suffice. We stand before our critics answering their charges with book, chapter, and verse. We implore all people of the world to submit to the gospel of Christ. Does the church need a revolution? Does it need to be overthrown, renounced or substituted for by vigorous dissenters? Absolutely not!

The church doesn't need a revolution, it need a revival. A revival is "a period of renewed religious interest." It also carries the idea of "flourishing again." This we can easily change if we have the heart to do so.

If there is to be a change, let it be in the direction of the cross. The church of the 21st century can be as exciting as the church of the first century. This will only happen by increasing the interest of all people in the church that Jesus built. The same gospel principles taught by Christ personally, and then through His inspired writers, are the only workable formula for the church now and forevermore.

God's Faithful Children

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15).

This verse from the Psalms causes our minds to reflect on the many Christians who have passed from this life. We know that, in spite of the great strides in the world of medicine, death comes to everyone. Just as surely as we are born we will die, unless, of course, the Lord comes again during our lifetime. The writer of the Hebrew letter tells us, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). The faithful children will then go home to be with God forever.

God, in the very beginning of creation, looked ahead and saw that mankind would need a Savior. So when the time was ready, according to his plan, God sent His only begotten Son from heaven to earth to be our Savior. Being sinless, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. His blood takes away all sins of those who obey the gospel plan of salvation, and

it continues to cleanse those who remain faithful. How grateful we should be for the wonderful privilege of being members of Christ's church, and for the promise of eternal life that has been given to the faithful. Read Revelation 2:10.

John, in Revelation 21:4, describes the peace that the faithful will enjoy in heaven: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Heaven is so wonderful that, once we get there, we will never want to return to this old world of sorrow and sin. We will be filled with peace and joy forever. What a wonderful future is promised to God's faithful children!

The One and Only

The apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:1-6: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Humility — lowliness and meekness — is an essential part of a Christian's character. To esteem others better than ourselves is something all of us need to practice in our daily lives. Lowliness and meekness are not signs of weakness, but rather a sign of great strength. Moses is said to have been a meek and humble man (Numbers 12:3). Christ set the greatest example of humility (Philippians 2:5-8). Both Moses and Christ showed great strength in their determination to serve God.

We are admonished to be longsuffering; another word for longsuffering is patient. We are told in the scriptures that we must not grow weary in well doing, but remain faithful all the days of our lives. Patience is something many of us need to practice. Our world is very fast paced, but we must never become so busy in the ways of the world that we neglect living the Christian life.

Let us consider carefully the seven “ones” mentioned in Ephesians, 4: one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and one hope. Colossians 1:18 teaches that Christ is the head of that one body: “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” To have the preeminence means to be put first. There is room for only one on the throne. Who is on the throne in your life?

“Choose for Yourselves This Day Whom You Will Serve”

Each of us, as Christians, should ask himself, “Am I truly a servant of my Lord? Do I serve Him with my whole being? Do I love Him with all my heart, soul, and mind? (Matthew 22:37). Am I winning lost souls? Do I find joy in seeing my brethren prosper, especially if they are more prosperous than I am? Am I happy living the Christian life? What about my relationship with God? Does it come from a pure and honest heart?” When we sincerely and thoughtfully ask ourselves questions about our relationship with God, we may be surprised at our answers.

Being a servant of the Lord is a great honor; true happiness is found in serving Him. We are reminded in Acts 20:35 that the Lord Himself taught it is more blessed to give than to receive. Unfortunately, selfishness is a way of life for many, and those who have selfish attitudes lead very unhappy lives.

Satan is at war with God for the souls of man. He has been deceiving man ever since the creation. Satan is constantly sending the wrong messages, placing many under bondage to him and blinding those who are under his control. In our fast paced world, it is all too easy to neglect our duty to study God’s word, pray, and serve the Lord as we should.

We must learn to seek the better things in life, and the best things truly are found in Christ. Through diligent and thoughtful study of the word of God, we will come to understand that happiness, peace of mind, joy, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith and love are found in Him (Galatians 5:22-23).

We are either servants of the Lord or servants of Satan. There is no

neutral position wherein we can just sit back and wait to see who will win. The Bible is very clear as to who will win this great battle: God will be victorious! Our efforts are needed in this battle. We should be busy preaching and teaching the gospel, bringing the lost to Him before it is too late.

Self-Starters

Much can be said about organization, organized activities, and the accomplishments of working together. Anytime a group gathers to do some task, someone must take the responsibility of being the leader. To be an effective leader, one must be a self-starter.

Christians must be self-starters if we are to accomplish what is required of us in order to be faithful. “For as a man thinketh in his heart, so it he” (Proverbs 23:7). Those who accept a leadership position half-heartedly and without focus will lack the enthusiasm required to be successful in that position. We must be self-starters if we begin a work that we can do alone — focused and deeply committed, willing to go the extra mile if necessary, being willing to give of ourselves in order to accomplish our goal.

The apostle Paul was a great example of commitment and focus when it came to teaching the gospel (Romans 1:16), suffering much for the cause of Christ. Likewise today the Lord needs servants who are willing to give their lives to Him, submit to His authority, and follow His example.

It is very important that each of us learn self-discipline and self-control. Becoming more mature in our Christian life and spiritual growth are absolute essentials if we are to fulfill our responsibility to the Lord and to others. Being lazy is a terrible waste; there is so much to be done. The church will grow only if the members are willing to work.

Evangelism

All the technology, all the computers, all the televisions and radios, all the papers and books, the workshops and the programs cannot take the place of personal evangelism. These things can be used as helps, but

there still needs to be one-on-one involvement to lead lost souls to Christ. Many great plans are made to reach the lost without having to personally teach face-to-face, but nothing can take the place of being there and sharing the word of God with some lost soul.

Love plays such a great part in carrying out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). It was love that God showed in giving His Son for us (John 3:16). It was love that Christ had for man that caused Him to establish His church (His kingdom). And we must have love in our hearts for the souls of all men to motivate us to carry the message, the gospel, to the lost of this world (Romans 1:16).

For a Christian to be a successful soul winner, he must be a devoted Christian, sure that his own soul is saved. His heart must be on fire to teach the gospel of Christ. He must have a knowledge of the word and be committed to winning lost souls. He must also be willing to learn from his mistakes. Life is too short and too precious to neglect carrying out the Great Commission by obeying the commandments of the Lord. The world starts just outside our doors. It is all around us in our community and everyone comes in contact with it.

We need to meditate on our lives and see just what we are doing to win souls for Christ. The shadow of death is approaching each of us; every moment we grow closer to meeting our Lord in judgment. Wouldn't it be wonderful to take someone to heaven with us!

Love One Another

We stand in awe before the powerful and almighty God, and we are amazed at how He can love us so much. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God is love, and all the promises God has made to His faithful children are motivated by love.

The apostle Paul wrote of genuine love in the 13th chapter of First Corinthians. This passage perfectly describes the love God has for us, and the kind of love we should have for God and one another.

If we really think about it, we can see that love is an integral part of

every commandment God has given us. When we obeyed the gospel, it was love that motivated us to respond. When we consider our faith, we realize that it is God's love that causes our faith to be strong in Him and His Son. We love God because He first loved us.

Brethren, if God loves us so much and we say we love Him, isn't it reasonable for us to love one another? How can we say we love God whom we have not seen and not love our brother whom we have seen? (ref. I John. 4:20) We are to love one another with a pure heart every day, and we are to prefer one another. So much happiness can be enjoyed by brethren who love one another and fellowship together.

We have been blessed so much in every way. God's love has been revealed to us in His word and by His example, leaving in no doubt the importance He has placed on love. Can we really expect to go to heaven if we don't have love in our hearts?

We Live Under the Gospel of Christ

The Bible tells us about three ages: the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian Age. We live in the Christian Age, the old law having been fulfilled when Christ died on the cross: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Colossians 2:14).

Many in the religious world even today try to practice part of the old law, either not understanding or wanting to admit that all the old law was taken out of the way by Christ's death on the cross. "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:3-4). The Bible speaks clearly on this matter: If we keep part of the old law we are bound to keep all of it. And the old law, with all its commandments and ordinances, was very burdensome. It was more than those who lived under it could bear.

The New Testament contains the gospel of Christ. Regarding the written word, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, his son in the faith, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man

of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). And concerning the assurance of the new law, James wrote, “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James. 1:25).

May each of us commit ourselves to a daily study of the gospel of Christ, obey it, and live faithfully all the days of our lives (Revelation 2:10), in the knowledge and understanding that the rewards will far outweigh the sacrifices.

Prepare Now to Meet God

Technology in virtually every area is growing by leaps and bounds. Because of tremendous advances, especially in the field of medicine, it is predicted by some that the average life span will grow much longer. While it may be true that man will live longer, we must never fall into the devil’s trap of believing we have all the time in the world to accomplish what we want, and thus put off doing those things that are needed today. The truth is we may not have another minute of time; each of us is but a heartbeat from death.

The author of the book of Hebrews affirms the danger and folly of putting off becoming a Christian: “And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). The assurance of our salvation should be of utmost importance in each of our lives. The blessings we have in Christ will lead to a happy and fulfilled life on earth, as well as provide hope in the face of death. The apostle Paul was secure in this knowledge, stating, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). For the faithful Christian, death is just a doorway leading to an everlasting life with God.

Paul encouraged the Corinthian brethren not to lose heart: “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Our life is made up of choices. Let’s be sure we make the right choice where the future of our soul is concerned, and that we do not procrastinate until it is everlastingly too late. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

Fellow-Workers with God

“So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither is he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:7-9). What a great privilege it is to be a Christian and to live a life working together with God!

Concerning our labors, the apostle Paul wrote, “We, then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation)” (2 Cor. 6:1-2). “And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen” (Mark 16:20).

Paul also wrote concerning his own life: “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Paul had a real partnership with God; he wrote, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

It is such a great blessing and privilege to walk with God and to know that He is there helping us to carry out our responsibilities in service to Him. Knowing that we are doing God’s will should bring tremendous peace and happiness into our lives. We understand that God’s promises are to the faithful; may we be strengthened in this knowledge and prepare ourselves for a life of service.

Reaching the Lost

Evangelism is the means through which congregations grow. Even though I am committed to personal evangelism, other means of evangelism are also essential. Included among the many effective forms of evangelism are Bible classes, World Bible School, pulpit preaching, total evangelism (a program which emphasizes friendship and “we care” methods of reaching people with the gospel), and confronting, by which we talk to people about the condition of their souls and where they will spend eternity.

When the first gospel sermon was preached there were 3,000 souls converted (Acts 2:41), and through the continued teaching of the gospel, additions were made to the church daily (2:47). It wasn’t long before the church numbered 5,000 men (4:4). The Jewish council complained to the apostles that they had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine (5:28).

The early church had one common objective and that was to reach as many with the gospel as they could. They wanted everyone to hear the good news, and were committed to teaching it. The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32). They were not divided in what the work of the church was because all efforts pointed in one direction, that of reaching the lost. Some thirty years after the Great Commission was given, the apostle Paul wrote that the gospel had been preached to every creature under heaven (Colossians 1:23).

The primary task of God’s people is still getting the gospel to the lost. The churches that are growing today are those who are committed to making all programs of the church evangelistic. The idea that evangelism is only one facet of the work often results in the majority killing the zeal of the minority. All of us need to become more evangelistic; when we do we will begin to reach more lost souls.

There Is a Sin unto Death

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). If we find that we have

yielded to sin, God has not left us in a state of hopelessness. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). When a man comes in contact with a strong temptation and in the spur of the moment yields to sin, those who are faithful — not just the elders or preacher, but all Christians - are to restore such a one.

“If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it” (1 John 5:16). A sin not unto death is any sin of which one will confess and repent. A sin unto death is any sin of which one will not confess and repent.

Children of God must have willing hearts that are humble enough to confess and repent of sin. We cannot expect God to forgive us if we are stubborn and willful, refusing to confess and turn from our sins. It is said that attitude is everything. It is certainly a very big part of our Christian lives. We must make sure our attitude is right before God.

Changing Focus: From Materialism to Evangelism

Materialism has taken its toll on the hearts of many Christians. With far too many brethren, “it’s all about money.” The United States of America is the wealthiest nation on earth; even those on welfare in this country live better than 90% of the rest of the population of the world. And because of our prosperity, we have a tendency to place far too much trust in material things.

Let us not get so caught up in the riches of this world that we forget they are temporary, and that the faithful children of God have a promise of an eternal home so glorious that it is beyond our imagination. We must prepare ourselves for that home, and in doing so, we will develop a love of the souls of others so that we will do what we can to lead them there as well.

Despite the obsession of so many with material things, there is still a great harvest of lost souls possible in this great nation. The members of the Lord's church must step up and answer the call to teach the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Can you say you are doing all you can to bring lost souls to Christ?

Opportunity knocks at the door of each of us. Every day we have an occasion to talk to someone about his soul. When we ignore these opportunities we are not being good stewards of the time and abilities the Lord has given us. Each of us has a personal responsibility to the Lord. We cannot pay someone to do our work for us.

We show our love for Christ by keeping His commandments (John 14:15), and He commanded us to teach others (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). Let us take His words to heart so that we, like Jesus, may "be about our Father's business" (Luke 2:49).

The Plan of Salvation

HEAR

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

BELIEVE

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

REPENT

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

CONFESS

"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10).

BE BAPTIZED

"Then Peter said unto them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of the

filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscious toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).

LIVE FAITHFULLY

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

We come to Christ only through obedience to His word. Those who think that belief in Christ is enough, or think that asking forgiveness of their sins is all that is necessary for salvation are sadly mistaken. Unless we hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized for the remission of sins, we have not obeyed the gospel plan of salvation.

He Hath Appointed a Day...

Many in the world today believe that when a person dies, death is the end and that person ceases to exist. They believe neither in the judgment nor in the hereafter. Paul, in writing the Hebrew letter, said, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

Jesus spoke of the judgment in Matthew 25:31-46, where he vividly described the eternal abode of the righteous and the wicked. This is perhaps the clearest picture of the judgment in the Bible. As Christians we must be so convinced of the judgment that we will not only do our best to live righteous lives, but also teach others that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to avoid.

We read in 2 Corinthians 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” Judgment day will be frightening for all who are not prepared to meet the Lord. Nothing will be hidden on that day, for all is known to the Lord. And all will stand before the righteous judge to receive their just reward.

The word of God tells us in Acts 17:31: “Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men,

in that he hath raised him from the dead.” We who are God’s children have a wonderful hope - a hope for eternal life. We must be constantly awake and alert so we will be ready for that great day when the Lord will gather all men to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Restoring the Erring

Faithful Christians are commanded to do what we can to restore our unfaithful brothers and sisters in Christ. Following are some guidelines that will help us in this work:

BE COMMITTED

- Spend time in prayer on behalf of the unfaithful (James 5:16,20).
- Seek the opportunity to talk to the erring about his or her soul.
- Be willing to sacrifice some of your time.

BE CARING

- Let your erring brother know that your heart is broken because of his condition.
- Confront kindly, lovingly, and gently.

BE COURAGEOUS

- Don’t be discouraged by the fear of rejection.
- Be confident in the knowledge that God’s will is being done when the erring are restored.

Our love for the souls of others must be so great that we will put forth our best efforts in leading them back to Christ.

A Risen Savior

Those of us who are Christians serve a risen savior. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 that there were many witnesses who saw the Lord after His resurrection: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures: And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once;

of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.”

The most important historical event ever was Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection on the third day. Without this event man would be hopelessly lost; there would be no ransom paid for us. The blood Jesus shed in His death is the only element that could wash away our sins.

Each of us has sinned. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Only by coming in contact with the blood of Christ through the burial of baptism can we be free from our sins. While in that watery grave, our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ. “Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). When we are born again through baptism and are resurrected to walk in a new life with Christ, we are also added to the Lord’s church. “... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

The glorious Son of God came to this earth and died so that all mankind could be saved. May we never cease to give thanks to the Father for the marvelous gift He so freely bestowed.

Want Is a Bottomless Pit

Many articles have been written concerning children and the attempt to satisfy their every desire. The thought seems to be that, if parents say no to their children, the children will grow up inhibited and unable to freely express themselves, therefore being deprived of the chance for a successful life. This attitude has resulted in children who have grown up to be the most dissatisfied and unhappy generation in history.

Children who are not taught to respect authority grow up to be disrespectful to parents, law, government, human life and God. The drug and alcohol craze in this country has come about as a result of the absence of self-respect and respect for others. The sexual revolution sweeping our country is due to the mind-set that man should have everything he wants

without suffering the consequences of his actions. Those who ascribe to this way of life then feel mistreated if they have to answer to the law.

Self-discipline and self-respect go hand in hand. When we fail to instill these values in our children and grandchildren we are doing them a grave injustice. The truth is happiness is not found in trying to satisfy every want. Want is a bottomless pit that can never be filled. Children who are taught self-respect and discipline, and who feel good about themselves, are on the road to a successful life.

Happiness is a state of mind; it cannot be bought. Many people have gone through fortunes trying to attain it. Some think happiness can be found in alcohol or illegal drugs; some think it can be found in fornication. These are the wrong places to look for happiness. Those who want to be truly happy need to search God's word to see what He has in store for His children. Through obedience and faithfulness to God, we can make happiness a reality in our lives.

Trust

Many friends are not as close as they could be simply because they lack complete trust in each other. One or both do not trust the other because of the fear of being hurt.

Husbands and wives often have this same difficulty in being able to completely trust each other. Past hurts and disappointments may cause them to be on guard with one another, often struggling to be the first to attack the other. Many times they cannot stand criticism from their mate. If the husband can truly trust his wife, knowing her intentions are good and that she only wants what is best for their marriage and their home, it will relieve a lot of his apprehension toward her. Likewise, if the wife can fully trust her husband it will ease her anxiety.

Christians often have much the same problem in our relationship with God. Many times we fail to give ourselves wholly to Him, trying to hold back some of our lives for ourselves. This attitude, and our lack of trust in God, can only result in dissatisfaction with the Christian life. We are admonished to love God with all our hearts, souls and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). When we are able to give our all, withholding noth-

ing, we will be able to draw very close to God. The Christian life, when surrendered to God, is a beautiful life, filled with love, trust and peace.

Brethren, we will never find true happiness as long as we are controlled by the fear of being hurt. We all need to meditate and pray that we can learn to build trust - trust in our mates, trust in our friends and most of all trust in the Lord. We must learn to be open, never hardening ourselves, both with the Lord and one another.

Don't Try to Fix What Is Not Broken

Growing up on the farm during the thirties and forties had many advantages. This was during the Great Depression, and money was hard to come by, but many good lessons were available to all who were willing to learn.

My brothers and sisters and I learned responsibility at a very early age. By the time I was nine years old I was working as a regular field hand on the farm. We used mules to pull the farm equipment, and I remember that one of the mules was my responsibility to take care of. This I did with great care and devotion. I came to care for this young mule and made sure he was one of the best mules in the county.

My dad could always find chores for us to do; he did not believe in kids being lazy but thought we should be kept busy. I learned obedience and great respect for my parents. I also learned that rebellion did not pay but hurt the one who was rebellious. Parents did not go out of their way to entertain children — children learned to play and entertain themselves. When older people spoke, children listened, and as they listened, they learned. It was in this way that children developed good common sense.

Many who have grown up in the last 35 years have learned much in school, and this education has helped them to get good jobs, but there has been a failure in teaching people how to live. Our country is suffering from a lack of good common sense and because people are not willing to accept responsibility.

Brethren, the church has been suffering, especially in the last 30 years, because of those who are rebellious and lack common sense. Why can't we as a people accept God's word as it is revealed in the pages of the Bible? Why can't we accept the church as God's spiritual kingdom? Why are many trying to change it? Why try to fix what is not broken?

Let's follow the word of God and try to do a better job of being careful and committed to God's word. Let us use good common sense in dealing with the problems of life. Stay faithful!

This Is Important

The church is losing 50% to 90% of our children after they graduate from high school. Many Christian parents suddenly become aware that their children have grown up and now have minds of their own. When this happens parents sometimes throw up their hands and say that their children will not listen to them anymore and feel that they have lost control. They actually lost control many years prior to their children graduating from high school.

Many parents are very concerned and careful to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They do not provoke their children to wrath. They discipline and correct them. They teach their children to respect one another and to love and obey their parents. These children usually grow up respecting God and being his faithful servants. They are a joy to their families, friends, and to all with whom they come in contact.

There are parents who have been blessed with wonderful children, but who neglect them by being involved in activities they seem to think more important. Many parents work long hours and tell themselves they are doing it for the children. When they do have free time they are too tired to give quality time to their family. Sometimes parents just simply fail to provide the guidance and discipline that children need. They fail to teach the children to have self-respect, respect for one another, and respect for their parents. This often results in children growing up having no respect for God, the family, the church, the law, or anything that requires humility or unselfishness.

Some of these children have not obeyed the gospel. Lacking proper respect and faith they turn away from God and the church. Then parents will wonder where they went wrong. Parents and grandparents must find time to provide the environment that is suitable for the development of our children into faithful children of God.

The Choice Is Ours

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). When God created man He made him a spiritual being, so that man would be in His image. God has shown love for man ever since the creation when He placed man in the beautiful Garden of Eden to dress it and care for it. God’s love has been shown in many ways, but the greatest act of love that God expressed toward man is that of giving His Son to die on the cross so that man, through obedience to the gospel of Christ, can have forgiveness of sins.

Belief in God and His Son Jesus Christ is the very foundation of the plan of salvation. A strong faith will lead us to repentance, confession and baptism for the remission of sins. Faith is the anchor for our souls. It gives us hope of a better life that will last forever.

There is no reason for anyone to be lost. God has given us the gospel (Romans 1:16), and it is the power of God unto salvation. If we will obey from the heart the gospel plan of salvation and will live faithfully unto death (Revelation 2:10), we can enjoy heaven for eternity. The final choice is ours. Do we choose to obey God?

Time Is Running Out

There are some things that are necessary if we want to be successful soul winners.

We must first have the desire in our hearts to win lost souls for Christ. This desire must be cultivated if it is to grow and motivate us to win lost souls. We must care so much that, even after working all day, we are willing to take the time to teach someone about Christ. Soul winners have been known to postpone vacations, give up fishing trips and

other forms of recreation to teach someone about Christ.

Soul winners are to confront kindly, lovingly and confidently. The difference between being successful and failing lies in our ability to confront those who are lost in a non-threatening way. Kindness is very important; people respond to kindness. The way to confront lovingly is to confront others in the way we would want to be confronted. We must consider that those we want to teach are sensitive, caring people and must be treated with kindness and love.

We must be confident, believing that people want to hear about Christ and learn more about what it means to be a Christian. We must have confidence that those with whom we study will obey the gospel. We must teach until we have answered their questions and know that they understand what they must do to be saved. When this happens they will respond — God will give the increase.

Time waits for no one, so we must make the most of the time we have. People are dying every day outside of Christ. These people need the opportunity to hear the gospel. Brethren, you and I have the responsibility to teach the gospel while there is still time. We are the earthen vessels and children of God. We are His servants who have been entrusted to carry His word to a lost world. The harvest is white and the workers are so few. Won't you determine to be a soul winner and really try to take someone to heaven? Time is running out; we must act while it is yet day.

Walk Close to God

Elders who try to be shepherds of the congregation will do well to lead by example, always taking the safe course according to the word of God. The teaching of the scripture is plain concerning the plan of salvation, and it is also clear on leading a faithful life. It is only those who have not completely submitted their will to God who have a problem obeying His word. Once a person has settled in his mind that he is going to follow the direction of God's word, then much of the pushing against the line that separates Christians and the world will stop.

It seems strange that Christians, who have the promise of heaven

and live far better lives than people who live in the world, would want to partake of the sinful things of the world. Instead of trying to walk as close to the world without stepping over into it, all Christians should walk as close to Christ as they can. We need to study God's word and learn more and more about what God would have us to do so that we may grow closer to Him.

Hope, peace and confidence become a part of our lives when we completely submit ourselves to the Lord. Let's add to our lives the Christian graces and pray that someday we may reach heaven which is prepared for the faithful.

Be Positive

The power of positive thinking cannot be denied. Without positive thinking the achievements of men would be very small. The apostle Paul was a positive thinker. In Philippians 4:13 he wrote, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." These were not just words, but this message was a part of Paul's life and a very important part of his ministry.

As the apostle Paul lived, preached and taught the gospel of Christ, he turned one negative after another into positive action. He preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified even in the face of terrible physical and psychological persecution. The greater the persecution, the greater the effort he put forth. His efforts, plus those of other early preachers and of a Christian brotherhood committed to spreading the gospel, resulted in the gospel having been preached to the whole world in Paul's lifetime.

We need to follow Paul's example of possessing a positive outlook and determine to turn life's negatives into positives. Much of our emotional and spiritual growth comes about as a result of Bible study and hard work. Pain can be a positive step toward understanding the suffering of Christ and others. True spiritual growth comes as a result of positive action and leads to peace of mind, the basis of true happiness.

The Bible is a book of both positives and negatives. There are negatives in life that can make us become more positive. For instance consider the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21. We can see that

these are destructive, but by rejecting them and embracing the fruit of the spirit spoken of in Galatians 5:22-23, we are taking positive steps toward becoming more mature Christians.

Hell is the most negative place imaginable. The thought of spending eternity there pushes us toward heaven, which is the most positive place we can imagine. This further illustrates how a negative can be used to guide us into positive action.

Hope

Hope is something we must all possess if we are to live joyful and tranquil lives. Not only must Christians have hope, but we must also reflect it. Where there is no life in a congregation, there is no hope; where there is no hope, there is no expectancy. Expectancy always hopes for something better — it always believes that better things will happen.

I am full of hope and expectancy for the Lord's church - filled with hope that love, joy, happiness and peace will always be with us and expecting that we will be a church alive and active for Christ, that we will glorify the great name of Christ Jesus and be busy reaching out to the lost. We must take the gospel to a world that is spiritually starved. We must be awake to every opportunity to reach lost souls.

We can imagine a church with no goals — a congregation drifting along like a ship without a rudder. This, brethren, is not what we want this congregation to be. We must not grow weary in well doing, but have the vision to move forward to spiritual and numerical growth — a church busy growing toward total evangelism. We must be about our heavenly father's business.

Married Couples Should Be Happy

If husbands and wives would conduct themselves as the Bible has directed, much hurt, heartache and pain would be avoided. "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ,

so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it..." (Ephesians 5:22-25).

A record number of marriages are breaking up — families are being torn asunder, suffering much heartache and despair. Many women are influenced by the Women's Liberation Movement and are not accepting their roles as submissive wives and mothers: many men do not love their wives enough to die for them. Men often do not treat their wives with wisdom and unselfish love. Instead, they go their own way trying to fulfill their own selfish desires, disregarding the needs of the family.

"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh: but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church..." (Eph. 5:28-29). "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh" (Eph. 5:31). Married couples need to go back from time to time and read again the vows they took when they were married, being willing to make every sacrifice necessary to build a good Christian home.

Is It Worth the Risk?

There is so much pain and hurt in the lives of people today because of sin - especially sexual sin. People are seduced by Satan to think that anything they have a desire to do is okay. "Grab all the gusto you can — you only live once" is the cry of pornography and many movies and television programs. Many books are just pure trash, written under the guise of literary value. On and on we could go, mentioning those things which have become an accepted way of life in the world in which we live.

Sometimes marriages are literally ripped apart by the unfaithfulness of one or both partners. Children suffer pain and hurt that may very well scar them for life. Many people play around with sex. It's like playing with dynamite when one becomes involved with unlawful sex and is unfaithful to his or her marriage partner. The relationship is blown into a thousand pieces and only with patience and hard work can trust be rebuilt and the marriage made to work again. All the pain, guilt, hurtful

thoughts, doubts, lack of trust and anger must be dealt with. Many marriages end in divorce because they just can't stand the terrible consequences of the sin of fornication.

If people would only think ahead, and if each young person and adult (married or unmarried) would keep himself pure in body and mind, the terrible consequences of sin could be avoided. Our nation is crumbling around us because of the sex-crazed society in which we live. It is being torn apart with broken homes. The children follow in the parent's footsteps. There are many hearts broken and dreams smashed and, worst of all, souls that are lost. Take time to think: Is fornication worth all that you hold sacred, even to the loss of your soul? Is it worth the risk?

Sins of Consequence

I was raised on a small farm in Mississippi and I know what it's like to chop and pick cotton. My dad loved to raise cotton, and he kept the children busy. He felt that if children spent their energy working they would be more likely to stay out of trouble.

After I became skilled at chopping and picking cotton, I could think about other things while I worked. I can remember many times when my mind turned to God and heaven and how wonderful it would be to go there after my life here was over. This desire caused me to be very careful about the things I did. Temptation was all around us, but many of us managed to stay away from alcohol and drugs. We understood the importance of keeping ourselves pure and did not engage in sex until after marriage. Sins of consequence were avoided because we were taught good morals and responsibility for our actions.

Brethren, let's use the good minds that God has blessed us with and refrain from sin against our own bodies and against God. Joseph set a good example for us when he refused Potiphar's wife. In Genesis 39:9 he said, "...how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" We need to think like Joseph and accept responsibility for our actions. Remember, many sins have consequences that may affect us for the rest of our lives.

We Can Find Happiness

Sometimes people - even some who are members of the church —

think of the church as being made up of only perfect people. They look at a greenhouse where plants grow so healthy and beautiful, and they think that people in the church are like the plants in this greenhouse. But in reality, people in the church could better be compared to trees in a forest. Some grow tall and straight while others are scarred and bent by the elements.

Christians should not be too critical of one another — we should not gripe and complain and find fault. As Christians we are to love others even if they don't appear to be perfect. We must use our talents and abilities to make the weak stronger and to bring comfort and peace into the lives of those who are less fortunate.

“Love one another” is not just a phrase thought up by some man. It is a commandment of God. How can we say we love God whom we haven't seen and say we hate our brother or sister whom we have seen? God is a spirit and God made man a spiritual being, able to make choices between right and wrong.

Many people are in a constant state of depression. In this state they see only the ugly and bad things around them. Then they complain about everyone and everything. They are unhappy and they blame circumstances and other people for their unhappiness. This is so unfortunate, because with a little adjustment, they could be happy, positive people.

I believe happiness really is a choice. Therefore if life is to be enjoyed, we must make it happen. It is up to us to make our lives — lives that are dedicated to God. It is only in Him that we can find true happiness.

Fish for Lost Souls

One of the great privileges that the Christian has extended to him is the privilege of bringing others to Christ. Soul winners can be compared to fishermen. A good fisherman must be well prepared in order to do well at fishing. Likewise, one who fishes for men must be prepared to present the gospel in a very kind and gentle way if he is to be successful in bringing souls to Christ.

One of the most important characteristics a fisherman must possess is patience. If he is patient, he will not be discouraged when he has to

wait for results. This is also the case when we fish for men. We must be patient and do our job well. We cannot become discouraged and give up too soon. If we do, we will find we do not lead many souls to Christ.

A fisherman will go where the fish are and will choose the right kind of bait. Then he will patiently cast until he catches fish. When we fish for men we must go where people are — then use the gospel of Christ patiently and keep working until we bring someone to Christ.

Jesus worked with His disciples to train them to be fishers of men. They observed Him - the Master Teacher — as He worked in His personal ministry here on earth. We can go to the word of God and learn at the feet of Jesus as we feed on the word. We, too, can become successful fishers of men, but we must first have the love and desire to win lost souls.

Be Faithful

I really believe that many Christians do not realize the impact their absence from worship has on others. When we make excuses for not attending worship, we are saying, in effect, that there are other things more important than worshiping God. I have listed below some selected statements about what my absence can do:

1. It may cause some to question the reality of my religion.
2. Some may think I am a pretender.
3. It may cause some to think that I regard my spiritual welfare and the welfare of others of small concern.
4. It weakens the effect of the church service.
5. It makes it harder for the preacher to preach.
6. It discourages the brethren and robs them of a blessing.
7. It influences others to miss the assembly.
8. It makes it harder for me to withstand the wiles of the devil.
9. It gives the devil more power over lost souls.
10. It encourages the habit of negligence.

We will have richer, fuller lives if we are truly committed to God. Some blessings of faithfulness include:

Improved relationships with family and friends.

Happiness in our Christian family and our Christian life.

A knowledge of being prepared for eternity.

Peace in Christ.

In order for these blessings to be a reality, we must commit ourselves to Christ and be willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to live faithfully for Him.

Knock on Any Door

The world we live in and have come to know is one where people often let their lives get out of control. Many homes have only one parent. Pressures build up creating stress that is hard to deal with. People turn to alcohol and drugs to find relief from all the pressure they are under. Of course, this only increases the problem, and if addiction sets in, lives are completely destroyed. Alcohol and illegal drug use are sins with consequences, and those who engage in them will pay dearly in this life and — unless they repent — in the hereafter.

You hear much about the sexual revolution people in the United States are experiencing. Caution is ignored, and people engage in fornication on a regular basis. Many couples live together outside of wedlock. People must stop and think — all sex engaged in outside of marriage is a sin, and sexual sins carry consequences that affect those who are involved for the rest of their lives and sometimes for several generations. Joseph set a good example for all people, regardless of age, when he said no to Potiphar's wife. He asked: "...How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). If only more people would do as Joseph did and keep themselves pure.

Knock on any door and you will find problems: families who do not get along, husbands and wives who bicker and fight because they don't respect each other, children who are abused by unhappy parents and who are not taught what is right and wrong, children who are indulged with anything they want because parents feel guilty for neglecting them. Some parents try to buy their children's love to make up for the lack of teaching, training and communication between the parent and child. Some who profess to be Christians are letting the works of the flesh take over their lives. We must obey God's word if we are to be right with Him.

Don't Drink

People consume alcoholic drinks thinking all the time that they can handle alcohol and that it will never make them slaves to its use. Alcohol is a powerful drug, and every day thousands of gallons are consumed by men, women and children. Yes, even children are consuming this powerful drug every day. Pregnant women are consuming alcohol, resulting in babies born with fetal alcohol syndrome.

We could write about broken homes and highway deaths which are the result of drinking. We could mention the many “street people” who will drink anything that contains alcohol, the untimely deaths brought on by liver disease, and the breakdown of the body due to alcohol consumption. We could talk of those who are in prison because alcohol led them down the road to crime.

I believe that one of the most heartrending sights I have ever seen is one who obeyed the gospel of Christ — who believed in Christ as God’s son, repented of all his past sins, confessed Christ before men, and was buried in baptism for the remission of sins — and then turned again to drinking, knowing all the time that alcohol was destroying his character and his family, and was destroying his relationship with God. One who will give up the promise of an eternal heaven for another drink is most pitiful. Hell, in all its fury, will burn the lost in flames forever.

We Are Set Apart

Christians are set apart from the world in a spiritual sense. We have committed our lives to Christ and are looking for another home - a home in heaven. Because of this commitment Satan works night and day to entice Christians to turn from Christ and to follow him. Satan knows his time is limited. He knows that when Christ comes again the devil and his followers (those who have refused to repent) will enter a devil’s hell to suffer forever.

It is so sad when one of God’s children turns away from the hope of heaven and sells his soul for the pleasure of sin. God has made the supreme sacrifice: He gave His Son to die for us. If we turn from the

joy of living for Christ, we will make a terrible mistake.

Some Christians go back into the world because they haven't fully given themselves to Christ. When one obeys the gospel and begins to live for Christ, he must continue to study the word and grow as a Christian. Christians need a very active prayer life to help us to become stronger in our convictions. We need to become concerned about the souls of others and reach out to them to help them learn about Christ and what they must do to be saved.

It is difficult to imagine anyone who has enjoyed all the blessings Christians receive ever turning his back upon the Lord and neglecting to tell others about Jesus. The hope of salvation is such a blessing to those who have obeyed the gospel.. Wouldn't it be wonderful to know you had helped someone to obey the gospel? God uses His children to teach others. We are the earthen vessels. We must be about our heavenly Father's business.

Confronting Your Lost Neighbor

I recently read an article in *The Gospel Advocate* by Larry West, who has held many training classes on personal work. He has been made aware of the lack of courage among our brethren to confront the lost about where they will spend eternity. Over the years I've taught several how to become effective soul winners and have found that same fear present in those in my classes.

To care enough to talk to the lost about their souls is a must if we are going to be able to convert others to Christ. We will show our neighbor we really care when we ask this question: Do you know, nothing doubting, that if the Lord were to come right now, that you would go home with Him to live forever? When we kindly, gently and compassionately ask this question we are not going to anger anyone. He is going to see that we care and he will really think about where he will spend eternity.

It seems that many people have trouble confronting without getting angry. Often husbands and wives, when confronting one another about something, are already angry. By example they teach this lesson to their children, and the children grow up thinking this is the way to confront. If

one is to be an effective soul winner, he must learn to talk to others — no matter what the subject — and not get angry. When he becomes upset it shows in his voice and usually leaves the impression he has no concern for the one he is trying to convert. His voice may become sharp and harsh; his face may become red and his whole body taut. The sinner sees this, and he also gets angry. His answer is not likely to be a positive one.

Let's let our love and concern show plainly. If we will do so we will win souls for Christ.

Fishing for Souls

One of my childhood memories is that of growing up on my parents' small hill farm in Mississippi. Almost every summer, about the time we laid by our crops, we would plan a fishing trip to the river about seven miles west of our home. The day before we were to go fishing we would dig worms for bait. Then the next morning we would hitch the mules and head for the river.

Once we arrived we set up our camp. Then we would take our hooks and set them along the running slough. About every three hours we would run the hooks, take off the fish and rebait the hooks. We did this all night and when morning came we would prepare a good breakfast over an open fire. We always came home with a good catch of catfish.

Since I have grown up and become a Christian, I have wanted to fish for men's souls. This is such an important work. It's the most important work we can do in the Lord's kingdom. We must find good prospects and use the gospel of Christ to reach their hearts. Fishing for lost souls is very encouraging. When we prepare well, are patient and use the ability that God gave us, we are going to bring others to Christ. A good fisherman must have confidence that he will catch fish; so must one who fishes for the souls of men. We must believe there are people out there in the world who want to hear about Christ and are willing to become Christians.

The Church of Christ

We are baptized into the body of Christ. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be

bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1Corinthians 12:13). “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead: that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18). “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23).

The church of Christ was established on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and the church is revealed in the pages of the New Testament. The time and place of its establishment, its organization, worship, and the means of entrance are all clearly revealed in the words of the Bible.

We must get the message out to our friends and neighbors that the gospel plan of salvation, when obeyed, is the means by which we gain entrance into the body of Christ — the church of Christ. One must hear (Romans 10:17), believe (Mark 16:15-16), repent (Acts 17:30), confess (Rom. 10:10), be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and then live faithfully until death (Revelation 2:10). Only through obedience to the plan of salvation can anyone be saved. We must get busy teaching the gospel.

Earthen Vessels

“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints...” (Ephesians 5:3). There are many who are involved in fornication and all uncleanness. It is sad, but there are those who have obeyed the gospel and then have turned to a lifestyle of lust and sin. The Bible is clear concerning these things and unless one will turn from his wickedness, he will lose his soul. “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Romans 6:13).

Covetousness is unlawful desire — to want things and desire them to the point that one will go against that which is holy and good. Covetousness is also referred to as idolatry. There are people who will sell their bodies and who will murder just to obtain some earthly possession. This is sin. We who are of God’s family should put away from us those desires that cause us to sin.

The apostle Paul said we should not let these sins be named among us; we are God's children. We must cleave to that which is right so that we may be righteous. We must keep our minds and bodies clean and pure that we may be holy. We must fill our lives — both mind and body - with humble service to our heavenly Father. Only in this way will we be pleasing to our Lord.

The message of the gospel of Christ has been placed in earthen vessels. We are the means whereby God spreads the gospel. He has no other plan to spread the gospel but by His servants. We must be about the business of teaching the word so that others will be saved.

Let's Be Unselfish

I can remember many things my dad taught me. One particular saying of his concerning selfishness sticks in my mind, and I have observed the wisdom of his expression. He said that when people become so self-centered that they think only of themselves, they become very small. In contrast, I have observed those who think of the welfare of others and really make an effort to help; these are the people who grow and mature in their spiritual lives.

There is so much to do, and first on the list must be caring about the souls that are lost. And not only caring but really seeking to lead them to Christ. God has given us the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16) so that we can be saved, and not us only, but every person in the world who will obey from the heart the wonderful message of salvation.

When we become really selfish and think only of ourselves, we tend to be critical of others. We stop being our "brothers' keepers" and we lose our desire to help others. We no longer fit the description of the saved who will appear before the Lord in judgment as recorded in Matthew 25:31ff. Let's look outside ourselves and make room in our hearts for others. Let's make a genuine effort to become caring and loving brothers and sisters in Christ.

God's Children

Christ is sitting at the right hand of God and is ruling over His kingdom, the church. "For he hath put all things under his feet. But when

he saith, All things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him” (1 Corinthians 15:27). Christ is our high priest; He is the mediator between God and man. While Christ is ruling over all things at present, someday all things — including death — will be subdued unto Him. “And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

The day is coming when Christ will turn all things over to God, when Christ will return to take His children with Him. The fourth chapter of 1 Thessalonians teaches us that Christ will not put His feet to the ground when He returns but that we will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air.

Those who hold the premillennial view don’t believe that Christ is now reigning. They believe that Christ will begin His reign at His return. The Bible teaches that Christ is now reigning (1 Cor.15:25) and that Christ will end His reign at His return (1 Cor. 15:28).

The church is the body of Christ. “...and he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18). We are baptized into that body (1 Cor. 12:13). Christ is the head of the body (the church) and we have been added to that body by God (Acts 2:47).

God’s People

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his “marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Christians are God’s chosen people today, not fleshly Israel. The church is God’s new Israel. “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:28-29).

God’s people are a royal priesthood. Every Christian is a priest with the great privilege of praying directly to God through our High Priest, Jesus Christ. “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly call-

ing, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus. Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house” (Hebrews 3:1-2).

God’s people are a holy nation. The church is God’s holy nation today, separated from the world and dedicated to God. Christians have been called out of the world by the gospel of Christ, and those who have obeyed from the heart the gospel plan of salvation have been added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47). The apostle Paul said in Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” God’s people are a peculiar people, literally a people for God’s possession, separated from the world. The people of God are a special treasure to Him.

All Christians should proclaim the excellencies of the new life in Christ. We are not saved for ourselves alone, but we must be active in winning as many souls as possible for Christ.

To Admonish

“And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Romans 5:14). The apostle Paul penned these words to the church at Rome. I wonder if he could say those things about Christians of today.

Just what does it mean to be full of goodness? If we are to have this quality we must possess the Christian graces. They must be such a part of our lives that every day we live we will show these wonderful qualities. Jesus possessed these qualities perfectly. If we will try to walk in His steps, we, too, can possess these wonderful qualities.

Knowledge can be obtained through a diligent study of God’s word. We have such a wonderful opportunity to know more and more about God’s word. The more we study the more we learn; the more we learn the more we realize we need to use what we learn wisely.

To admonish one another is truly a worthy endeavor. We must encourage, we must warn, we must lead the way so that weaker brethren

may be strengthened. The Christian life has great responsibility. We must work carefully to be filled with goodness and with knowledge and to be able to admonish one another. If we can grow in these qualities we will mature as Christians.

Be Forgiving

Humility is a virtue that all Christians must possess if we are to be faithful. The very act of becoming a Christian requires that one humble himself unto God and give up his stubborn will and pride. Being born again into God's family requires a spiritual birth into a spiritual family. We must become humble as little children to please God.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:15-17). Sometimes brethren will have problems that develop between them. The Lord told us how to handle these: there should be a forgiving attitude.

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3). This kind of attitude would do away with much of the hurt feelings and resentment - if we could only esteem others better than ourselves. We need to learn this lesson and be a humble and forgiving people.

Don't Forget Your Promise to God

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as you see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). The church suffers greatly from so many of its members being absent from Bible study and worship. On any given Lord's Day many are absent, and this really hurts because every person who attempts to lead a Christian life has someone watching him. This someone sees the strengths and weaknesses of the Christian and makes judgments accordingly.

If the Christian is seen leading a clean, pure life (faithful in attending worship and doing good works for the cause of Christ), others will be influenced to want to become Christians also. But if the Christian lives like those who are in the world, others will be influenced to believe that there is nothing to the Christian life.

Those of us who have obeyed the gospel of Christ have enlisted in the Lord's army. We have made a commitment to God that we will be faithful and true unto death. We must keep this promise to God. Eternal life is offered to the faithful; a devil's hell is the reward to those who live unfaithful lives. I cannot conceive of anything greater than eternal life with God.

Neither Cold Nor Hot

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15-16). These words were penned describing the church at Laodicea. I wonder if these same things could be said truthfully about the church today.

The church of Christ is certainly in the minority, but when the minority really believes in something, they can bring about great changes. Look at the many issues in our country that are being influenced by the minority. We need to wake up and get involved in reaching lost souls - this is the greatest effort that Christians can be involved with. It is terrible when God's children become lukewarm and don't really take a stand or are not committed to anything.

There are very few Christians who will confront and talk to the lost about their souls. God has placed His gospel in earthen vessels to be delivered to a lost and dying world. If we are not doing this, just what other purpose do we have? Many wonder what their purpose is here on earth. I hear this often from older Christians whose health has failed. I wonder how many Christians, who are healthy, wonder about the same thing. Someone taught us the gospel and we obeyed; someone must teach others the gospel so they can obey. If God's children will not do this, who will? God has provided no other way, other than to use His children, to deliver the gospel message to a lost and dying world.

We Can Make a Difference

Our beloved nation is going through many changes. People are restless; many are unhappy; many homes have changed from the stable, secure places they were in years gone by. There is a search for pleasure, for peace of mind, for happiness and security. People are not looking to the Bible for the answers to their problems but are looking to find fulfillment in drugs and material possessions.

We must not become a nation that has forgotten God. Christians ask, "What can I do?" Or "What can the church of Christ do?" We are so few in number and our voice is so small, we think we can never be heard. But there are some things we can do:

1. We can make sure that we are committed to God and that our families are faithful Christians. We can get on fire for Christ to everyone who will listen. We must try to bring the light of the knowledge of Christ into the hearts of others.

2. We can be the very best citizens we can be by paying our taxes and obeying the laws of the land as long as they do not conflict with the word of God. Each of us should be the very best neighbor, the best worker, the very best moral person we can be. This is in harmony with the teaching of the Bible. Christians must set an example in this area of life.

3. We are always to do things in moderation, to avoid strife, to live at peace as much as possible. We must not compromise our relationship with God, but always be true to Him, resolving to live each day for the Lord.

4. We must be positive in our outlook on life. Remember the apostle Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

We Can Do More

We are reading reports in church papers almost every week telling of the need for workers to enter the former Iron Curtain countries that have opened their doors. Will the church be able and willing to respond

in a positive way? Brethren, the use of television, radio and good publications is a great help in spreading the gospel, but there is nothing that can take the place of personal contact with people who need to hear and respond to the gospel.

The apostle Paul told of the reaction of the early Christians in facing this task: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). What is our reaction when we realized that the command to go teach means me?

I believe that many brethren dream about being able to lead someone to Christ. Deep down we know that Christians are the only means that God uses to bring the gospel to the world. We really do care. But the world is so big how can we make a difference? Think with me back to Christ and the twelve men He chose to spread the gospel. One of those betrayed him leaving only eleven men to "...preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). Those eleven men were a small minority. The task must have seemed overwhelming considering the population of the world. But they had sufficient faith and, in Paul's lifetime, the gospel was preached to the whole world. Brethren, we can do more to preach the gospel.

Churches of Christ

Romans 16:16

Many wonder about the church of Christ. When did it begin? Who was its founder? Many also wonder when denominational churches came into existence.

Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18). Later, in Acts 2, we can read about the church as it came into existence.

The apostle Paul talked about a falling away that took place even during his lifetime. This falling away continued for many years. During this time, faithful Christians were found in minority groups and were called "heretics".

In the year 606 AD Boniface III took the title of Universal Bishop of the Catholic Church. During the period known as the Middle Ages, the people did not have the Bible. John Wycliffe, who died in 1384, translated the Bible into the English language. Early in the 16th Century, Martin Luther, a Catholic priest, tried to reform the Catholic Church. Though Luther did not intend to begin a new church, after his death his followers formed the Lutheran Church. After this, many denominations were formed and, because of their opposition to the Catholic Church, they were called Protestants. All protestant churches are less than 500 years old.

It is entirely possible to join one or more denominations without ever accepting God's saving grace and without ever becoming a member of Christ's church. It does make a difference to which church we belong.

Many seem to forget that Jesus built His church over 1900 years ago exactly as He wanted it. It existed hundreds of years before Catholic and Protestant churches came into existence. When the word of God, the pure seed, is planted today, it will produce Christians only, united in the one church established by Christ himself.

The doctrines of men, when mixed with the pure seed, result in various denominations; today they number over 300. All men should be careful to take only the pure word of God and obey it. It will make only Christians (Rom. 1:16).

Fear

Fear is a part of everyone's life. Sometimes when we don't understand something we have a fear of it. I believe this is true about personal work. Most of us who have worked for years in personal work have overcome our fear of meeting people and talking to them about their souls.

Some people have a problem with knocking on the door of a stranger. For some reason they can hardly bring themselves to do it. There are others who love to knock on doors, anxious to meet new people. Some people are "people persons."

People who don't want to be involved face-to-face with strangers can work with World Bible School, a wonderful method of evangelism which allows prospects to be taught by correspondence. Many have been brought to Christ by this method.

Whatever method you use to reach people with the gospel, let me encourage you to do it. Time is passing very quickly. There is no greater work than teaching someone about Christ. Those you convert will spend eternity in heaven. This is the greatest motivation that a soul winner can have. We must not wait but be about teaching and preaching Christ.

Grace

There is a belief among some denominational churches that one cannot fall from the grace of God. The fact is that one must be in the grace of God before he can fall away. Most denominational churches do not teach the gospel of Christ - faith, repentance, confession and baptism for the remission of sins. Therefore, they cannot fall from grace because they have never been in the grace of God.

"Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). Those who were New Testament Christians and had turned back to the Law of Moses had fallen from grace.

Read carefully Acts 8:1-24. Simon the sorcerer obeyed the gospel preached by Phillip. When Peter and John came to lay their hands on the new Christians that they might receive the Holy Ghost, Simon offered them money to try to buy this gift. Peter's response is found in verse 22: "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Simon had fallen from grace and was told to repent and pray that he might return to the grace of God.

In 2 Peter 2:20-22, we learn that Christians can fall from grace by going back into sin. "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it has happened unto them according to the true proverb: The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." These scriptures clearly teach that, though they once were saved, they fell from grace when they turned back to a life of sin.

Christians Who Care

In Acts 7, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, preached a sermon so powerful that those who did not believe in Christ couldn't bear to hear it. They gnashed on him with their teeth; they stopped up their ears, and they stoned him to death. Stephen was faithful unto death. Each of the apostles, with the exception of John, died a martyr's death for preaching the gospel of Christ. Many Christians, in the days of the early church, gave their lives for the gospel.

"... Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). When we read about these great men of faith, we are made to wonder about our own commitment. Are we ready to die if need be for the gospel of Christ? I believe that if we are truly committed, we will find time to teach those who are lost. We will realize the need to reach lost souls so strongly that we will confront those who are lost and present the gospel to them.

Evangelism and church growth go together. Church growth just cannot take place unless there is a strong emphasis on teaching lost souls. The only way the church can truly grow is by adding new members. We need to care enough to teach others about Christ, baptizing those who will accept the gospel of Christ. Brethren, let's be about winning souls for Christ. Let's respond to the opportunities that come our way and be faithful, dedicated Christians who care about lost souls.

Knowledge

Paul told Timothy: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The knowledge that we can obtain by the word of God is the most important knowledge available. It is when we put some time into studying the word of God that we come to know about God, His Son, and God's plan for man.

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). When we look into God's word we learn many things that help us in our faith. It is difficult to believe in something or some-

one we know nothing about. Every Christian should be a student of the Bible. Families who study and apply the lessons in God's word are the happiest families. We find peace of mind and hope for our souls, and we learn how we can spend eternity with God in heaven. We find that our relationships are much better, and that a Christian home is filled with love for one another as well as love for God. Not only does a Christian family love God, but they are eager to obey Him.

The world is full of people who have obtained great knowledge about a number of things. Some spend most of their lives in school to learn about things the world has to offer. But when our life here is over and we depart to meet God, it is our knowledge and obedience of God's word that will determine where we will spend eternity. When we take time to think soberly, we know that our relationship with God is what is important.

A Great Responsibility

There is a gulf between the church and the world. This exists because believers are committed to the moral standards of Christ and non-believers are not. Christians do not always live up to these standards, but forgiveness of sins is one blessing that Christians have. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

It has always been difficult to maintain the moral standards in the church. In the early church, congregations like Corinth had moral problems. In the last 40 years a great change has taken place in our country. When I was a boy attending public elementary school, we had chapel service every morning where prayer, Bible reading and singing took place. We have come a long way since those days, and much of the change has not been good.

Our children and grandchildren are growing up in a different environment. This places a great responsibility on Christian parents to train their children to maintain good morals. The church has a great responsibility to teach its members to abstain from the evils of our modern society. This also places a great responsibility on the elders. Elders

must see that the teaching and training of the congregation is sufficient to help the members shun the sins of the world and to cleave to that which is right with God.

Keep Thyself Pure

There are those who find themselves in a quandary when it comes to making life choices. Many things that were rejected only a few years ago are now socially acceptable.

Morals are very important in the lives of all people, but the Christian must have the very best morals. I know we can't get to heaven on morals alone, but neither can we go to heaven without good morals. Christ lived a pure life and set the example for all who would wear the name Christian. If we are to let our lives shine and influence others, we must live every day for Christ.

Brethren have difficulty understanding when some very strong member of the church, such as an elder or preacher, becomes involved in sin — especially sexual sin that has far-reaching consequences. When this happens weak brothers are really shaken. Some will say that if Brother So-and-So could not keep himself pure, what chance do the brethren have.

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Yes, all have sinned. No one except Jesus Christ has lived a perfect life. But many have avoided sins of lingering consequences, such as sexual sins. Many, like Joseph, have kept themselves pure and have learned from the mistakes of others.

The devil works on people of every standing. We must not be caught asleep, because when we think we stand, we just might fall.

Real Value

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

These are such great and wonderful qualities for anyone to possess. We who are children of God should strive not only to meditate upon these things, but to acquire as many of these qualities as we can.

These qualities are real; they really do exist and we can be thankful that they do. The world makes fun of anything the Bible teaches. It also belittles those things which are good and right. But there are many people who still believe in these things and who have many of these qualities. If none of these existed, just think what a drab and corrupt world we would live in.

Christians are to choose the high road. The high road consists of things that have real value. When we study the word of God we find the way to heaven is referred to as the narrow way with the strait gate. The attributes mentioned in Phil 4:8 are of real value and will build us up in our Christian living. They will help us to travel along that narrow road and to enter by the strait gate. We must make the right choices about what we put into our minds and always choose those things that will help us to live for Christ.

Fear of Rejection

It is difficult for Christians to do personal evangelism because of the fear of rejection. Most people are not used to being told no, and being rejected is so distasteful to them that they may never bring themselves to talk about salvation to others. Many won't even talk to members of their own families. There are mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, and friends and neighbors who will never hear the gospel of Christ because some Christians just cannot talk about the gospel to them.

There is one way we can overcome the fear of rejection, and that way affects all of us to some degree. Love is the key — loving and caring for the souls of those who are lost. Loving and caring so much that we bravely approach them with the gospel and earnestly and gently talk to them about salvation. I believe very few people really want to be lost. There are many who are waiting for someone to care about them enough to talk the gospel to them. You or I can be that someone.

When I think of all the personal evangelism classes that have been taught and all the sermons that have been preached on personal evangel-

ism and just how few people are really busy talking about the gospel, I am amazed. People normally do what they want, and I believe that Christians really want the lost to be saved. Brethren, we must do as the apostle Paul when he said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).

God's Wisdom Is Pure

Christ said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). God is pure in all His attributes and characteristics. His words are pure: “The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6). Even the commandments of God are pure: “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:8). God's wisdom is pure: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

There are many scriptures that talk about purity. As Christians we must learn that remaining pure in our thoughts and lives is essential if we are to wear the white robes of the redeemed in heaven. Christians are a special people who have been separated from the world to serve God in His spiritual kingdom. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Many in the world laugh at those who try to live pure lives. There is nothing sacred to them — they are hardened by sin. But those who are faithful to God know that purity of mind and body is essential if we are to have the happiness and peace that we desire.

Temptation

I have never known a time when temptation has been stronger. It is a fact of life that we are going to be tempted. Satan will use every device to tempt us to do evil. He will try to lead every Christian away from Christ.

Christians should be constantly alert because the world is trying to make sin appealing and desirable. If we are not alert and prepared to do battle against Satan, he will slip into our lives when we least expect it and devour us. We are not to desire to do the things of the world.

All Christians need to watch the company they keep. Those we spend time with influence us more than we realized. That is why we must choose carefully those with whom we associate. Many young men and women have done things they would never have done if they had not been influenced by those they were with.

We can overcome the influence of Satan if we will feed on the word of God daily and put the things we learn into practice. Good is stronger than evil. If we choose that which is good we can overcome evil. 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us that if we will look to God He will provide a way of escape. Sometimes it may be necessary for Christians to flee from the very presence of evil. When we do, we will find that we become stronger and that Satan cannot take over our lives.

The Bible

Members of the Lord's church are starving for spiritual food that is found only in the Bible. The word of God has lost its appeal in many of our Bible classes; psychology books with a religious flavor have become the choice of the day. It is possible to go from the nursery to adult classes studying only the books written by fallible men. The greatest book on earth has lost its appeal to many.

The gospel is found in the Bible. Unless we are willing to go back to the Bible and learn the word, we are not going to build strong spiritual foundations. We cannot teach what we do not know. How are we to go forth in this community teaching the gospel of Christ if we do not know it?

Sometimes I wonder if the many Bible versions available today have caused dissatisfaction with the Bible. Many of these versions are not respected like the older versions we have used for years. Unless members of the Lord's church have a good knowledge of the Bible and unless we show our love and respect for the inspired word of God, we are going to bring up a generation that knows very little about the Bible.

1 Corinthians 13:10: “But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” The apostle Paul was speaking of the complete revelation of the word of God. “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:25). This perfect law is the New Testament. We must be students of the word if we are to serve the Lord in the way He would have us to. Our worship, too, must be according to the word of God. Unless we worship as He directs us, we will be like Cain, Nadab and Abihu — displeasing to God. He will be pleased only with those who worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Virgins

The world mocks those who are virgins. There are those in our society who think any kind of behavior is okay as long as it is between consenting adults. This kind of thinking is what has caused the “sexual revolution.” It is not true that everyone engages in sex outside of marriage; many single young men and women continue to keep themselves pure, remaining virgins until married.

Those who engage in sex outside of marriage are not taking the right road in life. A lifestyle including fornication will have far-reaching consequences that they must bear the rest of their lives.

Those who remain virgins have much of which to be proud. They are keeping themselves pure for their future spouses. The trust and respect which must exist in a good marriage has a very good chance to develop in this kind of relationship. “Marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

We should applaud all young men and women who choose to remain virgins until marriage. God, through His holy word, teaches us to remain pure in both body and soul. Please read 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, Ephesians 5:3, and 1 Thessalonians 4:3. It is clear that fornication should not be a part of the lives of those who profess to be Christians.

Prayer

Prayer is such a great privilege! Prayer should flow purely, honestly and sincerely from the Christian's heart. When we pray, we are talking to God; when we read the Bible, God is talking to us. We must show respect, reverence, and love for God when we pray and when we read the Bible.

Sometimes people pray in an arrogant, demanding and proud manner. Their prayers are long and repetitious, and are usually prayed to be heard of men. Jesus gave us an example of how to pray in Matthew 6:9-13 and in Luke 11:2-4.

Going to God in prayer is truly one of the great blessings a Christian enjoys. Christians are the only people that God has promised to hear. "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth" (John 9:31).

When our hearts are heavy with the trials of life and we feel we cannot go on, as Christians we can lift our voices to God and talk to Him. We can and should lay all our burdens on the Lord, realizing always how very much we need Him.

Our prayers are to be offered in the name of Jesus, with the understanding that only through Christ can we reach the Father.

We Are Servants

To be a servant in the Lord's church is a great honor. Servants must be humble if they are to be successful. Humility is especially needed by those who are in positions of great responsibility. It is difficult to be in these positions in the world and remain kind and humble. When men and women become caring and sensitive, humble and kind, loving and serving, they can really be effective as workers in the Lord's church. We must care about the souls of others and reach out to the lost with the gospel.

Love within the Lord's church is something that every congregation should have. There should be a desire within every Christian to love one another. In the course of a lifetime we meet many Christians; we should love each and every one of them.

There are many talents among our brethren. We need to recognize these talents and use them for the glory of God. Those who use their talents in service to the Lord are usually very happy. It is good to be unselfish and caring. We need to encourage these very special Christians and help them to find the opportunity to serve. Remember "... it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Some people have so much to give. They need to be encouraged and appreciated.

Worldliness

"Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). This command sounds foolish to those in the world, but to the dedicated Christian, it makes good sense.

Worldliness includes the sins in which the world is involved. Some of these sins are uncleanness, pornography, immodest clothing, modern dancing, petting and fornication, smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, drugs, narcotics, gambling, marriage failure, conforming to the world, and works of the flesh. We could go on and on naming the works of the flesh and the sins that are common to worldliness.

We have become less sensitive to these sins and more and more permissive. Television is bringing these things into our homes for the entire family to see and hear. Preachers are not preaching enough against sin; teachers are not teaching against the dangers of sin; elders are not taking a strong stand against worldliness; and parents are not teaching their children to abstain from sin.

We must be very careful or we are going to be swept away by the world. Christians must fight against the sins of this world. If we are not against sin, then we are for it. Jesus said we are either for Him or against Him. Let's be with Jesus and against the sins of the world.

Walk with God

Many people have trouble submitting their will to anyone. Sometimes these people even have trouble submitting their will to God. Many times you will hear people say: "God walks with me," or "I told God to do this or that." We cannot expect God to walk with us — we must walk with

Him. He is the One who knows the right way. We never have the right to demand things from God. We must learn to be His humble servants.

A rebellious spirit is something that a Christian cannot have and be pleasing to God. Instead, one must be humble and kind and always submissive to God. A proud and haughty spirit will bring much trouble and hurt to one's life. It will destroy friendships and cause trouble in the congregation of God's people.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:33-36).

We must realize the greatness of the Lord and humbly serve Him all the days of our lives. We must walk with Him and be willing to follow where He leads.

Obey Those Who Have the Rule Over Us

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1). Christians must obey the laws of the land. They exist for our protection and benefit. We must be supportive of our government and law enforcement officials. Some will boast about breaking the speed limit. Others will refuse to wear a seat belt. Some will drive automobiles that are unsafe and drive recklessly just to show their disregard for the law.

Many people, including Christians, complain about paying taxes to support the laws and programs of our government. Sometimes they feel that certain laws are not fair to all the people, but we must obey these laws. We must bring up our children to respect our government and our laws. We must show that we as parents are law abiding and that we submit to those who have the rule over us.

Christians must be law abiding and supportive of their rulers. They make it possible to enjoy the freedoms we have in this country to worship

God without fear of anyone who might disagree with us. Many young men and women have given their lives to protect this freedom. We must be an example for good and let our lights shine. In order to do this we must be good citizens and obey the laws of the land according to God's will.

Wisdom from Above

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). We all desire to be wise. We seek wisdom, but many times we mistake knowledge for wisdom. It is true that knowledge is to be desired because wisdom is the wise use of knowledge; but if we make knowledge an end in itself, we are missing one of the key ingredients to a successful life.

It is not enough to be considered wise according to the world. That is worldly wisdom. One needs to be wise according to the word of God. To be truly wise one must obey the gospel of Christ and live a dedicated, faithful Christian life. That kind of wisdom will lead one into a pure, clean and holy life. This kind of life is full of mercy, gentleness, peace and produces good fruits.

Neither does one show partiality. There is no hypocrisy in the life of a person who is truly wise.

If we seek knowledge, we must study in order to obtain it. If we seek wisdom, we must pray for it. The wisdom that is pure comes from our Heavenly Father. Let us all seek knowledge but also pray for the wisdom that we may use this knowledge wisely.

The Blood of Christ

“And it shall be in that day, that the living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be” (Zechariah 14:8). Christ came to earth to make the perfect sacrifice. He gave His life to take away the sins of all who will do the will of God. This includes those who lived in former times as well as those who lived this side of the cross even until the end of time.

The blood that Christ shed on the cross was for the cleansing of the sins of all who will obey God. Those who kept the Patriarchal and the Mosaical laws were cleansed by the blood of Christ. This blood flowed back and cleansed their sins. Those who live this side of the cross have their sins cleansed by obeying the gospel of Christ. As time continues, the blood of Christ remains the only element by which sins can be forgiven.

There are many questions concerning the cleansing of sins of those who lived under former dispensations. I believe that Zechariah 14:8 tells us that the blood of Christ flowed both backwards and forward. I believe we can see the importance of God sending His Son to die for us. Without this great sacrifice man would be without hope. The love of God is beyond our comprehension.

We Are God's Family

Until the last few years, Christians referred to one another as “brother” and “sister”. We recognized that we were members of the same spiritual family and that God’s children are truly brothers and sisters. God’s family is such a special people. We are special not because of some worldly fame or some social position or achievement of a worldly nature, but because we are members of a very special family — a family of which we will always be members once we are born again through obedience to the gospel — not just for a lifetime here on earth, but for eternity.

This family is made up of servants, people who give unselfishly for the cause of Christ. We are people who are committed to serving the Lord with all our strength. It is truly wonderful to be a member of this family. When brethren call one another “brother” or “sister,” it designates a very special relationship — a relationship that is truly wonderful; it helps us to feel loved and accepted by other Christians. When one is referred to as “Mr.” or “Mrs.” it seems so distant and cold. Don’t we refer to those in the world as “Mr.” and “Mrs.”? Those we call “brother” and “sister” are those who are truly God’s children and those with whom a special closeness exists. Let’s be proud to be members of God’s family, and let’s love and respect one another as brothers and sisters in

the greatest family that anyone has ever known - God's family.

Some Things That Will Help A Congregation to Grow

- ✓ Elders must be evangelistic in their thinking and planning.
- ✓ The preacher must be evangelistic and preach sermons encouraging personal evangelism.
- ✓ The educational program needs to be evangelistic. Teachers need to teach evangelism as a way of life for Christians.
- ✓ Congregations must stay doctrinally sound.
- ✓ Leadership must be able to visualize the church as a strong, evangelistic growing church.
- ✓ We must love the souls of others and be willing to teach them the gospel of Christ.
- ✓ We can have church growth only when we are bringing in more than we are losing.
- ✓ First century Christians were very evangelistic. They went everywhere preaching the gospel of Christ.
- ✓ The apostle Paul was very evangelistic. The missionary journeys prove this to be so.
- ✓ Congregations must dare to dream of being everything that God would have His children to be: sound in doctrine, pure in life, and committed to reaching lost souls.
- ✓ Congregations must have the desire to reach the lost.
- ✓ Congregations with no outreach will not grow. When they do everything just for themselves they become satisfied just to serve themselves.

Double Standard

Parents have a great responsibility to set good examples before their children. Many dedicated Christians are concerned that the influence of the world is having a bad effect on young people.

Never have I seen so much openness concerning sin. It seems that shame has vanished and that anything one wants to do is acceptable. Our children and grandchildren are growing up in a world like this. We need to be careful that we set the proper example before our children.

Christians know that God set the standard for morals and that the Bible will help us to live a pure and righteous life. Children should not view the dirty television programs and movies that come into our living rooms and local theatres. Parents must set the example by not thinking that it is all right for adults and not for children. This is a double standard that is just not right. Christian parents do not need to fill their minds with filth but to keep their minds and bodies pure. We must shun evil and think on those things that will build us up spiritually. Actions speak far louder than words.

Our Mercy Seat

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). God has blessed us by giving His Son to die, that by the shedding of His precious blood we, through obedience to the gospel of Christ, may have our sins forgiven. Christ is truly our mercy seat. At the time of the law of Moses, the high priest entered once a year into the Holy of Holiest to sprinkle the blood of an animal on top of the Ark of the Covenant (the mercy seat) so that God would forgive the sins of the people. We today must contact the blood of Christ if we are to have forgiveness of our sins.

In order to contact the blood of Christ one must obey the gospel plan of salvation. We must hear (Romans 10:17), believe (Mark 16:16), repent (Acts 17:30), confess (Romans 10:10), be baptized (Acts 2:38), and live faithfully (Revelation 2:10). If we obey the gospel from the heart, we will contact the blood of Christ and our sins will be washed away. If we will live faithful Christian lives and truly repent of our sins, the blood of Christ will continue to cleanse us of our sins.

Jesus Christ is our mercy seat. He is our Advocate with the Father. It is through Christ that we are able to reach the Father in prayer. We should always pray in Jesus’ name. We are blessed to have One who has

suffered and who has been tempted in every way we are to be there for us, to intercede on our behalf with the Father.

Pure Wisdom

God's wisdom is pure. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

Children of God's family need the wisdom that comes from above - a wisdom that will help us to keep our lives pure. Joseph demonstrated this kind of wisdom when he, as a young man, refused Potiphar's wife. He would not sin against God.

We need the peace that comes from pure wisdom. This peace will enrich our lives and cause us to be peacemakers.

We need to be gentle. There is so much roughness in the world. Many times a soft and gentle answer will turn aside anger.

Having mercy and good fruits are necessary if we are to let our lights shine as Christians so that others may see Christ in us and desire to be Christians also.

We sometimes show partiality among ourselves. God is not a respecter of persons; all souls are important to Him.

We must not play the hypocrite, but be the kind of person we appear to be. We must never play at being a Christian but we must live pure, dedicated lives every day.

Love in Deed and in Truth

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). It is wrong to use expressions of love if we really don't mean them. I am afraid the world has reduced its understanding of love to expressions that are empty and meaningless. It is a beautiful and wonderful expression when brethren can tell one another that they truly love them and prove their love by truth and sincerity and by doing deeds of love.

A husband or wife may tell each other that they love one another,

but if it isn't supported by deeds of love, it soon becomes just empty words uttered by the tongue.

God does not accept empty meaningless words. He expects His children to love Him with their whole heart, mind, soul and strength. He also expects us to show our love by keeping His commandments and working to do good deeds. We must be busy in the family of God. We must reach out to lost souls, to those who are hurting, and to those in need.

God loved us so much that He gave His Son to die on the cross for us. He proved His love by the great sacrifice He was willing to make. Is it not reasonable for Him to expect us to give up something for Him? In fact, we must give up something — our old way of life when we obey Him in becoming Christians. We must love in deed and in truth.

A Loving Church Is a Growing Church

A loving church is a united church. When we go back to the very first congregation of the church at Jerusalem we see a congregation that was together and had all things in common (Acts 2:44). Congregations today need to be together and to enjoy being together. They need to love one another with pure hearts. Where there is division you cannot have a growing congregation. A divided congregation cannot grow spiritually or in numbers.

A loving congregation is bound together by love. The members look forward to every opportunity to be together. They look forward to each service and the joy of fellowship with each other. Love will cause brethren to be kind, considerate, and helpful. It will cause each Christian to be a peacemaker and encourage harmony and goodwill within the congregation.

Love will cause the congregation to seek lost souls. This is a part of love - being able to seek the welfare of others. What greater thing can you do for a person than to take a personal interest in his soul and where he will spend eternity? A congregation whose focus is outward will soon be a growing church, but if we turn inward, taking care of ourselves only, then we will not grow. Remember the loving sacrifice that

God made for us because He wanted to save our souls.

The Real Purpose of Life

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). This verse of scripture demands that one must make a choice either to believe and be baptized, or choose to not believe and be lost. This is where faithful Christians play an important part in the decision of those who are lost. We can teach them the word of God that they may learn the truth. Then they will be able to make an intelligent choice based on knowledge of the gospel of Christ.

Those that love the souls of men are grieved to see lost souls going blindly on doing the things of the world. I can’t think of a life being more profitable than to be saved and to lead others to Christ. It seems clear that this is the real purpose of life.

Husbands and wives must help each other be faithful, and together they must lead their children to Christ. They then must continue to reach out to souls that are lost. This is the way the church is to grow. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” We must obey the commands of the Lord if we are to be pleasing to Him.

Keep Thyself Pure

Joseph was a man who had a good relationship with God. This can be seen in the way Potiphar used Joseph in his house. “And he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person and well favored” (Genesis 39:6).

Things went well with Joseph until Potiphar’s wife desired him. “And it came to pass after these things, that his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me. But he refused, and said unto his master’s wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the

house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand. There is none greater in this house than I: neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:7-9). It would be wonderful if our young people would read and take to heart the great lesson that Joseph teaches. If young men and women will control their passions and desires and keep themselves pure, their lives will be blessed. When a marriage is built on trust and love, many of the problems that can arise between husband and wife just will not happen and homes will be stable and secure.

Be Ye Doers

Many members of the church feel that they are pressed for time. Their lives are filled with so many things, such as their jobs, school activities, sports, plays, and television. It seems that there is just not enough time to do all the things we want to do. We don't have time for meditation. Everything is hurry, hurry. We must pause during this busy time and think and begin to sort out what is most important in our lives.

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22). Sometimes Christians will work out a time to attend worship service and spend a few minutes worshipping God each week and tell themselves that they have done all that God expects of them. But what about being doers of the word? Are we completely fulfilling that command when we attend worship services or does this command involve much more? The word of God teaches us that there are many things that Christians must do. What about the Great Commission? "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

There are many things that Christians must do to be doers of the word. We must study the word and be obedient to those things that God would have us to do. Only in this way can we be doers of the word.

Our Hero

Every war has its heroes. I am sure that there will be many brave men and women who will be counted as heroes in the war in the Middle

East. During peacetime many of the heroes that both adults and children look up to are sports superstars. It is only natural that we have people we admire who are either brave or have a great talent or skill.

We that are Christians need to have admiration for those who show bravery, commitment, and purity in life in the greatest war in history. This war is the battle for the souls of men. The forces of good and evil are arrayed against each other upon a battlefield that includes the entire population of the earth.

When we become Christians and begin to grow spiritually we are to prepare for this great battle by putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11). We have revealed in God's holy word what this armor is: "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Ephesians. 6:13-18). When we have completely surrendered ourselves unto Christ and have enlisted in His battle against evil then He becomes our Hero: One upon whom we can set our eyes and follow without fear because He is our Savior.

The Three Ages

It is made plain in the New Testament that the Law of Moses has been fulfilled. It seems strange that so many people believe that this law is still in effect today. Colossians 2:14-17 tells us that it was nailed to the cross with Christ. The books of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews give scripture after scripture showing that the Law of Moses is no longer in force and that the law of the gospel of Christ - the New Testament — is in effect today. We are told in Galatians 5:4, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law: ye are fallen from grace."

There are many religious organizations which try to hold on to parts of the old law in order to justify some practice in their churches - things such as instrumental music, special holy days, forbidding to marry, etc. We must be careful when we study the Bible to realize that the Bible is divided into three separate ages. The first is the Patriarchal Age. In this age, God talked to the heads of families, such as Abraham. This age lasted about 2500 years until the giving of the Law of Moses on Mt. Sinai. The Mosaic Law was given exclusively to the Israelites and lasted about 1500 years and included the birth, life, and death of Jesus. The third period is the Christian Age, which began with the establishment of the church on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ and will last until the end of time. We now live under this law.

Unless one understands these three periods of time, and the three laws that were given, and to whom these laws were given, it is very hard to get much understanding of the Bible.

Busy Serving the Lord

Ambition is very important. We see people who have very little ambition and their goals in life usually amount to very little. We like to see people do well in this life, to be able to support their families and to be able to help those who are less fortunate. But there can be too much desire to get more and more material things. It is good to set goals for ourselves. These goals should take into consideration the most important things in life. We can say without hesitation that our spiritual life must come first.

It is important to set spiritual goals so that each year we will grow in our spiritual life, that our relationship with God and our brethren will be stronger and filled with love and commitment. Living for Christ is a very active life, a life that has wonderful rewards, not only in this life but for eternity. Living for Christ can be a joy. There are so many things we can do to serve the Lord. Evangelism is one area of a Christian's work that brings great joy. Being able to help others who are less fortunate can be rewarding. Reaching out to others, being unselfish and knowing that our life is right with God can bring hope, joy, peace, and happiness into our lives. We must be busy serving the Lord.

Your Brother's Keeper

It is a difficult work to encourage those who are weak in the church. Yet it is the duty and responsibility of faithful Christians to strengthen and encourage those who need help.

Long ago the Lord asked Cain, "Where is your brother, Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9 NIV). The Bible teaches us clearly that we are our brother's keeper and that we have a responsibility in the spiritual family of God to reach out to those who have lost their way in order to restore them to a right relationship with God. "Let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

We must confront those who have turned back into the world. To confront effectively requires gentleness and kindness. It also requires understanding and patience. We must learn to have these qualities and be willing to put them into practice if we are to be successful in restoring the lost.

The New Testament

Concerning miraculous spiritual gifts 1 Corinthians 13:10 states: "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." James 1:25 tells us what is meant by that which is perfect. "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

Many think that which is perfect is Jesus Christ. They are ignoring the rest of the verse which says, "...then that which is in part shall be done away." Miraculous gifts were being discussed in this chapter and it is those gifts that are referred to here. Verse 12 says, "...now I know in part..." While the miraculous gifts were in effect the perfect law of liberty (the New Testament) had not been totally revealed and was not completely put together until about 100 A.D. That is the reason that Paul said, "...now I know in part." These special miraculous gifts were given

only for a time. That time was from the Day of Pentecost when the gospel was first preached until the New Testament had been revealed.

Since we have a perfect law (the gospel of Christ) revealed in the pages of the New Testament, there is no further use for the miraculous gifts. They served their purpose and have ceased (1 Cor. 13:8). Now we have the word of God completely capable of guiding us in the way God would have us to walk. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Let's be serious about studying the word of God that we may understand the way that God has provided for all souls to come to Him.

Entrusted with the Gospel

"But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts" (1 Thessalonians 2:4). Just as Paul and the other early preachers of the gospel were put in trust to preach the truth, God's children are put in trust today. These early preachers of the gospel did not worry about being men pleasers but they were concerned with pleasing God.

We are in the army of God, fighting a battle against Satan. We are locked in mortal combat for the souls of men. These are precious souls who have not heard and understood the gospel of Christ. As earthen vessels we are entrusted with the word of God. We are to get the message out to those who are lost. God tries our hearts. He knows those who truly care about lost souls. He knows those who are giving their very best to Him.

When we seek lost souls, it is necessary to confront. This is essential, because if people are not convinced that they are lost, they will not hear the message of salvation. Confronting must be done humbly, kindly, considerately and patiently, showing without question that we really care for the lost soul. When we are able to confront with this attitude, we will be surprised to see how many will respond to the message of the Gospel of Christ.